SURVIVING THE GRIDIRON:

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF COACH-PLAYER RELATIONS IN A TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PROGRAM

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Using positive youth development theory, this ethnographic study explores the idioculture of a Texas high school football team with particular insights into the intentionality of the coach's language with players. It yielded descriptions of certain behaviors, practices, and idioms that constitute the football program's idioculture and allow for exploration of a youth sport context that promotes positive youth development. Additional exploration developed the ways in which players on a Texas high school football team perceive the coach/player relationship relative to the coaching staff's efforts to motivate their players. Further exploration of these interpretations describe certain practices, artifacts and behaviors of coaches and players. In doing so, the themes of coach/player interactions, motivational techniques, and the community context are investigated to permit the better understanding of how coaches' actions contribute to players' experiences and their interpretation. Players reported that "new school" coaches who actively sought to motivate and engage players were better equipped to form more meaningful mentoring relationships with the players. This is opposed to "old school" coaches, who were viewed by the players to be less supportive and, at times, very distant to what the players wanted. As positive youth development values the role adults play in facilitating the growth of youth, it is important to understand how a coaches' action put him/her in a good standing with the player in order to better empower them.

DEDICATION

For Jill: I could never do this without you. You gave me hope when times were hopeless. You gave me courage when I was a coward. You loved me when I was less than loveable. This manuscript represents many sleepless nights. Thank you for your patience and love.

Molly, the day you were born you brightened my spirit. You reinvigorated my heart. Thank you for the push to the finish.

There are many people that contributed to my development. Students rarely go about writing and have it all figured out. There are two individuals that were instrumental in this document and my growth as a scholar. My advisor, Rudy Dunlap, believed in me when I did not. His skills with the written word is something that I envy, but it is his mentoring that I am thankful for. Dan, you are a true friend. The island of misfit toys is growing.

For all of the football coaches that pour their hearts into their programs, thank you. For all the coaches and kids at West Brook, turn the page.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In many ways, American sports embody the best in our national character—dedication, teamwork, honor and friendship. -Ronald Reagan

The National Federation of State High School Associations (2011) estimates that 7.6 million students participate in high school athletics each year and over 1.1 million high school students participated in football for the 2010-2011 school year. This level of participation in youth sport has a large impact on the lives of participants. Participation in these programs has been linked with various positive, as well as negative, outcomes in athlete's everyday lives (Bloom & Smith, 1996; Coakley, 2007; May, 2008; May, 2011). For example, young athletes learn how to interact with peers and authority figures through the process of playing their sport (Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005; Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). In particular, youth sport are a staging ground in where youth learn to behave within institutions and develop an understanding of the use of power vis-à-vis the coach/player relationship (Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005; Duquin, 1979; Edwards, 1973; Eitzen, 1999). For example, coaches who use a more democratic coaching style create a motivational climate that encourages pro-social behaviors for athletes (Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005; Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005).

Research has indicated stronger team bonds facilitate stronger coach/player relationships as well as more positive perceptions of athletic experiences (Gardner, Light Shields, Light Bredemeier & Bostrom, 1996). Despite recognizing the importance of the

coach-player relationship, questions persist regarding the specific way thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors facilitate or constrain the relationship. Further, little attention has been given to the coach-player relationship within the context of overall team culture. This gap is deserving of study because players interpret coaches' actions and their relationship within the relevance of a team's cultural norms. Given the potentially enduring influence of the experience of team participation on the lives of young athletes, it would seem worthwhile to examine the coach-player relationship, including coaching paradigms and tactics, as interpreted by players within the frame of team culture.

A Brief Review of Literature

Youth development researchers have begun to produce a growing body of research that has identified many benefits garnered from engaging in youth sport (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). Outcomes from participation in youth sport ranges from increased cognitive development which leads to better performance in the school setting (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005) to enhanced social and moral development (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Previous research has also identified numerous beneficial outcomes associated with healthy team dynamics, including the quality of team attitudes (Cumming, Smoll, Smith & Grossbard, 2007; Wellington & Faria, 1996), strong coach/player relationships (Gardner, Light Shields, Light Bredemeier, Bostrom, 1996), and successful team performance (Carron, Bray, & Eys, 2002). However, these studies have focus on the outcomes and not the incredibly complex team culture that resulted in such outcomes.

To understand youth sport, researchers have sought to understand the behaviors of the participants. To study to behaviors of the participants, we first must understand the culture and the dynamics in which these behaviors are situated. There has been a longstanding effort to understand how groups operate. Sherif et al's (1961) *The Robber's Cave Experiment* sought to understand how the processes of intergroup conflict and cooperation functioned. Sherif et al (1961) came to the conclusion the presence of a competing group was not adequate to quell intergroup conflict. They surmised positive group dynamics could only be realized when the group faced a superordinate goal, one that need cooperative actions to complete (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). Tuckman and Jensen's (1965) research went further and described the original four stages of team development (forming, storming, norming, performing). These stages could be applied to many different groups. While valid, Tuckman and Jensen's (1965) stages of group development neglected to account for the role of leadership within the process.

It is important to remember the atmosphere and relationships created by an authority figure can greatly impact a child (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). There are few other positions in an athlete's life who can be so influential as a coach. The coach is an integral part of the team. The coach sets the agenda for the program, so it stands to reason, understanding the role of coaches in the formation of the team is critical for the people who work with youth sport. Doing so will enable researchers to frame the experience in a positive manner rather than using a crude trial and error method. Within the coach's world there is a natural order of assessing athletes mindset and talent level.

This assessment is usually the basis of how a coach will interact with athletes. Paul Hersey's (1985) Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) will serve as a useful model to assess youth athletes' behavior and mental status. As there is a limited understanding of how the player's interpret interactions with coaches, I used preferred coaching styles to facilitate dialogue between coaches and players. I attempted to add a theoretical backing for an already common practice within coaching. SLT is quite useful as it serves to promote a non-utilitarian mode of leadership that supports the argument that there is not one best way to lead. SLT will serve as mitigating factor for coach's action based off assessments and provide a scholarly insight for potential problem solving modes of action.

Methodology

There are numerous ways in which to examine the world in which we live in and create through our interactions. In particular, my interests in the dynamics of the player-coach relationship demand an understanding of each party's behavior relative to the immediate context of the West Brook High School Football Program. As such, I have chosen an ethnographic action research approach to inquiry that endeavors to understand the manner in which participants' interpret each other's behaviors *in situ*.

In order to engage collaborators and create ownership of the issues we first must address how the social context affects the problems the participants face. Ethnographic methods are well suited as a means of inquiry as it seeks to capture both the depth and the complexity of social contexts (Wolcott, 1994) and the cultural meanings that are created from the contexts (Wolcott, 1999). To begin to understand team dynamics within

the context of West Brook High's Varsity Football Team, I first must begin to describe the culture of the team. As such, I will take on the role of an assistant coach, which entails going to practice, coaching in games, sharing meals, and generally behaving as an invested member of the team. By practicing with, working out, eating, and coaching within the team culture, I, the ethnographer, attempted to describe its worldview or *weltanschauung* (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 67). I generated data through the dialogic framework of action research, participant observation, interviewing, and potentially through document analysis.

I also selected action research as a mode of inquiry to involve the site in the investigation of its own phenomena. Action research is important because if the academic world seeks to promote social change and social justice we must collaborate with those people who experience the problem. Research's purpose is not the generation of knowledge but the generation of knowledge that informs practice. By treating research so we evade the tendency to replicate research power imbalances that favor the "researcher" and their need to publish over the needs and the feelings of the "subject." Employing action research also provides the opportunity for people to take ownership of the problems they face and the change they enact. By choosing an action research methodology, I engaged the site in the problems they face. Through this engagement, collaborators not only intervene in their own group processes but they claim ownership of the problems and the solutions that serve as the basis for future problem solving. I, as Friere (1970) did, reject the notion of the researcher finding solutions "for" people rather than "with" the people (Crotty, 1998). Doing "for" rather than with "with" creates the

investigator's monologue rather than a dialogue with the world (Crotty, 1998, p. 155). Additionally, I kept a researcher's journal documenting my own subjective reactions to the research experience. These methods will yielded various types of data, including field notes and interview transcripts, that was analyzed by grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2006).

Description of the Context

The context of the study is a Texas high school football program known as West Brook High (pseudonym). West Brook Independent School District is a 1A high school with an enrollment of 517 students comprising kindergarten through 12th grade. The football team is composed of 20- 25 male athletes that, due to the size of the school and lack of students, is relatively small for a high school varsity football team. West Brook's football program began in 2007, 2011 being the first year that its seniors had had four years of experience in the program. In keeping with its small size, West Brook's Varsity Football Program is staffed by only three full-time coaches, which is barely sufficient to meet the needs of a football team. These coaches live in the community and teach at the high school. Due to the size of the school, it is not uncommon for the coaches to have athletes in multiple classroom settings. This creates a unique situation of the coach having year round "face to face" relationships with the athletes. Although there is little sport specialization by the players, the coaches are responsible for multiple sports. This means that although players do not have time devoted to the football team year round but the coaches may interact with players in other sport. It is important to note the complex

relationships between the coaches and athletes, so that we may better understand the context in which they are situated.

The more time a coach spends with athletes the more mindful he/she must be of his actions and speech lest he undo the progress he has made within the time frame of the football season. In keeping with my choice of an action research that employs ethnographic techniques, I took the role of a volunteer assistant coach for West Brook's Varsity Football Team. Doing so allowed me to coach and document the full class range (freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior classes) of a high school football team who I have developed deep relationships over the course of a season that allow me to better understand the context. Acting as an assistant coach allowed me to make meaningful suggestions to the coaching staff and craft significant situations to promote positive interactions within the team that might not have been possible as an outsider. Additionally, the varsity level of play is characterized by higher levels of commitment, competition, and skill that creates an atmosphere that is ripe for understanding the culture of a Texas high school football. In this way, being an assistant football coach at West Brook High allowed for an in-depth view of the team, its inner-workings, the role of coaching paradigms in the formation of the team and provided a setting at which action research was utilized that is both useful for an academic study and beneficial for the site itself.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe the culture of the West Brook football team in an effort to better understand its coach-player interactions. Furthermore,

I attempted to positively transform practices to facilitate positive relationships at West Brook through an action research methodology. I investigated the following research questions to address this purpose.

R1.) Describe the team culture of the West Brook High football team. Specifically, what are the customs, rituals, values, and language that compose this culture? Additionally, how is that culture interpreted by its members (coaches and players)?

R2.) How does the coaching paradigm used by the West Brook High School Football coaches affect their relationship with players? Specifically, what practices are undertaken by West Brook High's football coaching staff to foster positive relationships, as previous research has established the possibility for fostering forms of positive youth development?

CHAPTER II

A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Youth sport, specifically high school football, present formative contexts in which youth learn to enter, interact with, and exit institutions. One aspect of youth sport that has shown to enhance the sporting experience and magnify these benefits is the culture of the team. What we do not know about team culture is the practical steps of how a coach uses their coaching philosophy (thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs) to facilitate the process of team development and how athlete's interpret such coaching philosophies. As such, the purpose of this study is to describe the culture of the West Brook football team in an effort to better understand its coach-player interactions. This project will seek to understand the role of coaching paradigms as a facilitator of the team's culture. There are several concepts and theories that will help guide this project including youth sport as a context for youth development, healthy group dynamics, and Situational Leadership Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969).

There is a general definition of positive youth development as intentional actions carried out by youth and adults to help youth navigate life (Larson, 2006). There is a general way that many children develop. Developmental continuity describes youth development as a continuous process of small changes like a pine tree growing taller each year. Developmental discontinuity describes youth development as a series of sudden, discontinuous changes that are can be explained by the life cycle of a butterfly (caterpillar, cocoon, butterfly) (Siegler, Deloach, & Eisenberg, 2006). Whichever model

of childhood development a person subscribes to, there is a concensus on the general path that children go through. For example, most two year olds attempt to learn about their world and tend to get into mischief, hence the terrible twos. While this developmental path is useful for teaching what is acceptable (stealing is bad); in other instances, it can be harmful (overtly teaching deviant violence in sport). Many academics and practitioners maintain that through teaching youth appropriate actions, the adults are actively pursuing youth development. In contrast, John Dewey argued that youth are in a state of becoming, not being. The word being denotes a fixed state. If we assume that, ontologically speaking, there is an essence to the state of youth, then as researchers we have a responsibility to refine and facilitate it.

Youth development happens in many different ways and in many different contexts. One such context is that of sport. There have been arguments made that sport is a cure all activity that can fix the problems of any child. The counter arguments note sport creates just as many problems that it has the potential to solve. This narrative is far from over. In order to understand the discussion we shall historically track the institution of sport to understand its purpose in the past and its possibilities for the future.

The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. – The Duke of Wellington.

Sport has had many different functions to many different societies. To the Mesoamericans, a ball game was played to honor the gods. The winning team was rewarded with being decapitated to appease the gods. The Greeks and Romans used sporting events in festivals to honor the gods and as for entertainment to the masses. The Middle Ages in Europe saw sport, at times, being used as training for war and at other

times, leisure. An exhaustive list of who used sport for any number of purposes cannot be approached within this document, it is simply too vast. Instead, I will track the genesis of youth sport in Europe that can be linked to modern conceptualizations of sport. Miracle and Rees (1994) note that youth sport can be tracked to the public schools of Western Europe. It was here that the notion that sport were a socialization mechanism for children was first developed. For example, Miracle and Rees (1994) extrapolate the meaning of honor through sport from a British phrase, "Play up and play the game" (p. 31). Play up and play the game was meant to signify playing the game to the best of your abilities but if you lost, you should loose, in terms of how many contemporary coaches would call, gracefully. This has been given the nomenclature "British athleticism" (Mangan, 1981). British athleticism shifts the narrative towards the first directions of a normative view of youth development.

Sport were, thus, a form of education in that ethics of sport were taught to the young men in educational institutions to expose them of how a "man" ought to behave. This set the stage for the Victorian movement of Muscular Christianity (Coakley 2007). Muscular Christianity saw the rise of the view that Christian men should be strong men. In other words, this kept in line with the prevailing puritanical beliefs that one could not know if you were one of God's predestined ones. You could only attempt to show signs of salvation through work performed in honor of God. The best way to pursue these ideals was to be fit and strong. Cotton Minchin (1901) alleged of Muscular Christianity, "The Englishman going through the world with rifle in one hand and Bible in the other"

(p. 113). The very meaning of manliness was infused with religious overtones. American was all too eager to adopt Muscular Christianity.

Although the terms traveled, they were quickly repurposed to meet the unique need of America. America had no historical landed gentry, no bloodlines that provided honor and status. Being the consummate gentleman was not seen as an American creation. Thus, the ideals that drove the Muscular Christianity movement in Europe fell by the way-side in America. Then what drove the American sport ethos? It began with an emphasis on winning. The Industrial Revolution began a formative change in the meaning of optimization (optimize meaning improve or enhance). Just as Muscular Christianity infused sport with implications of morality (Miracle & Rees, 1994), being better than others in sport hinted at an under lying sentiment that "moral power was transmuted into physical power" (Mrozek, 1983, p. 169). A victory not only meant you were physically superior but also morally superior. This sentiment stands, although somewhat evolved, today.

The Americanization of sport still serves its purpose today. Functionalist sport theory argues sport preserve the status quo (Coakley, 2007, p. 33). Coakley (2007) frames the functionalist sport theory as the socialization of people to each other through sport. General George S Patton gave a speech to the Third Army the eve before D-Day:

> Men, this stuff that some sources sling around about America wanting out of this war, not wanting to fight, is a crock of bullshit. Americans love to fight, traditionally. All real Americans love the sting and clash of battle. You are here today for three reasons. . . . Third, you are here because you are real men and all

> real men like to fight. When you, here, every one of you, were kids, you all admired the champion marble player, the fastest runner, the toughest boxer, the big league ball players, and the All-American football players. Americans love a winner. Americans will not tolerate a loser. Americans despise cowards. Americans play to win all of the time. I wouldn't give a hoot in hell for a man who lost and laughed. That's why Americans have never lost nor will ever lose a war; for the very idea of losing is hateful to an American (Patton, 1944).

Winning was not seen as an option, it was viewed as famous football coach Vince Lombardi has been quoted as saying, “Men, it's the only thing!” Sentiments such as this reinforce that American sport as an institution (Edwards, 1973).

Functionalist researchers have identified many benefits that are garnered from engaging in youth sport (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). There are benefits such as better health through increased activity and decreased chance for obesity (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). There are also greater reports of cognitive development leading to higher performance in the school setting (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005), pro-social (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1997) and moral development that tend to remain constant in life (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). These points serve to reinforce the notion that sport contributes to individuals and the society in which they have membership in.

While I, the researcher, will not go into the process blind to other perspectives of modern youth sport, I feel that the benefits that past research has shown to stem from youth sport far outweigh any negative aspect that might be found.

Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1998) define cohesion as "the dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or the satisfaction of member affective needs" (p. 213). Most people can give a vague description of the power of being part of a team from anecdotal evidence based on their involvement in team sport. Healthy team dynamics are associated with the quality of team attitudes (Cumming, Smoll, Smith & Grossbard, 2007; Wellington & Faria, 1996), stronger coach/player relationships (Gardner, Light Shields, Light Bredemeier, Bostrom, 1996), and successful team performance (Carron, Bray, &Eys, 2002). To better understand the effects of positive group interactions it is necessary to address the crucible in which they were born.

Culture is a social constructed reality for those who experience. Culture adapts to the prevalent mindset of the group. At the core, culture is to do with the group. There are many different interpretations of the common asked question, "What is culture?" To reflect philosophical beliefs of the researcher, this manuscript will work from the understand of culture as Schein (1985) describes.

> A pattern of basic assumptions- invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration-that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 1985, p. 9)

As the focus of this manuscript is not to try to redefine culture but to look at the relationships and meanings between coach/player interaction there will be emphasis on

the meaning of dynamics between group members and not a redevelopment current culture literature. Although individual groups, teams, and/or companies there is a general understanding of how groups go about creating and recreating themselves. The next section will employ Tuckman and Jensen's (1965) stages of group development to explain elementary group dynamics before moving on towards outcomes and interpretations of those dynamics.

Tuckman and Jensen (1965) maintain that specific phases of group development are essential for a team to grow, work together to meet goals and the inevitable completion of those goals. Their research produced a development model that can be applied to any forming group. The portions of the model that will be discussed in this manuscript will be limited to the first four: Forming; Storming; Norming; and Performing.

Forming is typified by behavior that drives group members to be accepted by others. Group members actively avoid conflict while gathering information and impressions of other group members (Tuckman & Jensen, 1965). Groups that are forming tend to have high motivation (Cobb, 2012). As a group transitions to the storming phase there is a refocusing of group goals to what they are actually supposed to address rather than focus on internal relationships. It is during this phase that different ideas and solutions compete for supremacy. The argumentative nature of this phase create situations in which group have the potential to attack each other and not deal with more pertinent team problems. In-group abandonment of pursuing these team problems can cause a group to never leave the storming phase (Tuckman & Jensen, 1965).

Storming is necessary to pass into the next phase, Norming. Within Norming, teammates come to an agreement of the overriding team goal(s) and create a collective plan on how to achieve those goals. Compromises are made and teammates assume responsibility for the Performing phase of team development. At this point teams are highly motivated and knowledgeable. The Performing phase is established by teammates being able to work well together in the completion of team goals.

There is little doubt of the general way in which groups come together. While team formation is significant it is important to better understand the coach/authority figures role in facilitating the process and the subsequent effects. Within the next portion of literature the importance of the coach/authority figure will be stressed in the conjunction with team dynamics and aforementioned outcomes.

Dworkin, Larson, and Hansen (2003) surveyed 450 high school student about their extracurricular activities. The authors reported that significant developmental gains were associated with these activities, sport being one of them. Sport were identified as a potent context for identity formation and emotional maturation. Among the potential constraints that sport offer it contained poor adult behaviors that manifest themselves as coaching strategies. Hedstrom and Gould (2004) note that the increasing research of how youth sport help facilitate youth development has strengthened the call for research on the effects of how youth sport leaders, or coaches, help define the experience. The call for such research reinforced Gould's (1982) assertion that more descriptive research of youth sport was necessary to help understand the complex structure that youth sport is

situated in order to address practical concerns and for the development of new theory (p. 213).

It is generally agreed upon that coaches can exert a tremendous amount influence on the team and the individual athlete (Terry, 1984). One of the areas of influence that a coach is thought to hold is his/her influence on team dynamics. Gardner, Light-Shields, Bredemeier, Bostrom (1996) used Carron, Colman, Wheeler, Steven's (2002) GEQ instrument, used to evaluate a group's cohesion, to investigate the linkages between perceived coaching behaviors and team cohesion. Although the authors found no cause and effect relationship in the statistical findings they do note that a single behavior cannot be viewed in isolation (Gardner, Light-Shields, Bredemeier, & Bostrom, 1996). One of the significant findings of the study linked higher reports of perceived team cohesion with a coach's ability to provide social support for the athlete (Gardner et al., 1996). In other terms, coaches that were able to provide a motivational climate that fostered trust in the coach/player relationship were met with larger levels of team cohesion, a crucial portion of team dynamics (Lott & Lott, 1965). It is clear that a coaches' actions and player's perception of those actions play a large role in the formation of a team's culture.

Duda and Ntoumanis (2005) note that the motivational climate set forth by coaches can be situated towards either a task involvement or ego involvement. Task involvement is the attempt by coaches to teach that the goal of the sport is the mastery of skills. Athletes attain subjective success by learning something new, self-improvement, and exerting large amounts of effort (Cumming, Smoll, Smith, & Grossbard, 2007). This

leads to more goals being set on learning the game and having fun. Ego involvement is a motivational climate that favors superior performance or equitable performance with less effort than that of the athlete's peers. This climate is more often used as a "win at all costs" mindset. Because coaches inhabit an influential position in the formation of motivational climate, many training programs to effectively maximize climate have sprouted in response (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming , 2007). Smoll, Smith, Barnet and Everett (1993) discovered interesting results from such training programs. Players perceived coaches who had been through the training program were seen as being more supportive and providing quality instruction from the coach. This led to players believing the coaches liked them more and produced increased feelings of encouragement from coach/player interactions (Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993). The largest finding was that athletes who self reported to have low self-esteem benefited greatly from coaches who had been through the training program in terms of highly increased self-esteem (1993). The prototypical training programs that are used to increase a coach's ability to improve the team generally adhere to award winning coaches' views of how a coach should not only coach athletes but develop skills for life. Gould, Collins, Lauer and Chung (2007) investigated how award-winning coaches build life skills through coaching. After interviewing 54 football coaches who were identified as finalists in the NFL's "Coach of the Year Award." Nominees are generated from NFL players who nominate a high school coach that they believed taught them about football and life. From the interviews two different categories that encompass motivation in holistic terms were specifically named as crucial to the team and for later life (Gould,

Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007, p. 27). The two area are setting/ achieving goals and team building. Setting and achieving goals are linked to motivational climate due to the fact that the coach frames the sport experience in terms of task involvement or ego involvement. The second category is team building. The coaches describe team building as different ways to empower athletes, hold team meetings, and emphasize the athlete's role with in the team. The coaches are describing different facets that contribute to overall team cohesion.

Turman (2003) outlined the specific ways college coaches foster/deter team cohesion for their athletic teams. He names social support a key issue due to social support existing far outside the lines of the athletic event itself. Eys et al. (2009) pointed out that the majority of work being done on team cohesion was aimed at the adult population (p. 330). Nevertheless, there remains a caveat within coaching that is highly linked to team dynamics. Although democratic behaviors were linked to more positive sporting experiences it was training and instruction that were closely linked with positive team dynamics (Gardner et al., 1996). Better training and instruction were seen as having a large impact on a team's interpretation of how interdependent they were. They began to understand that their actions had ramifications for the team and not just individual performance. When a team views itself as interdependent it increases the level of interpersonal attraction (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). For example, when a blind side tackle (so named for being the opposite side of the quarterback's throwing arm) in football is coached to understand that by holding his block a second longer allows the quarterback to find an open receiver. The quarterback understands that if he stays in the

pocket (the imaginary box that extends from tackle to tackle) he gives his tackles a technical advantage for having a general understanding for where the quarterback is. Their interdependence allows for a mutual understanding of each other's job and creates a vested interest between the two parties. They develop social cohesion through shared understanding of the role of other teammates. It can then be assumed that more informed protocol for instruction and training serves as a potential research inquiry to benefit teams in general.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

" . . . Social science and the humanities become sites for critical conversation about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, and community . . . We struggle to connect qualitative research to the hopes, needs, and goals of a free democratic society."

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3)

There have been many different ways in which team dynamics has been and could be studied. For example, Carron, Bray, and Eys's (2002) work uses survey data to link team success to the creation of team cohesion. This type of research assumes a cause and effect relationship between team dynamics and team performance, and while Carron et al.'s efforts are valid and useful in certain circumstances, they fail to bring forth the nuanced thoughts and deep emotions that occur in team sport, especially within the context. As such, this study utilized ethnographic methods within an action research design in an effort not merely to understand the mechanics of the coach/player relationships at West Brook, but also to affect change through within the culture of football program at West Brook High School. The facilitation of continued positive team dynamics and personal interactions is crucial to the project and to myself, the researcher. This particular action research design provides a collaborative research endeavor that allows the "researched" to be a part of the decision/problem solving enterprise rather than a more traditional approach. While many social scientists observe and report

findings that are intriguing, my own ethical concerns about the purpose of research drive my desire to affect lasting change within the context.

Research is the creation of useful knowledge for the world at large. For my work, the useful knowledge begins at a local level that improves the lives of those with whom I collaborate. The need to affect change is a manifestation of my personal quest to use research to better the lives of others. In this chapter, I will discuss the origins and characteristics of action research, the strategy of data collection, and the West Brook High School Football Program itself.

> . . . (AR) takes its cues-its questions, puzzles, and problems- from the perceptions of practitioners within particular, local practice contexts. It bounds episodes of research according to the boundaries of the local context. It builds descriptions and theories within the practice context itself, and tests them there through intervention experiments- that is, through experiments that bear the double burden of testing hypotheses and effecting some (putatively) desired change in the situation. (Argyris & Schon, 1991, p. 86)

Action research can be described as "collaborative research on issues of practical matters and attempts to close the gap between research and the way we live and work together" (Heron & Reason, 2006, p. 144). As we have previously discussed, action research seeks to create equality between the "researcher" and the "researched" by valuing the individual, treating local knowledge as a valid form of understanding, and the espousal of the research participants' right to be involved with the formation of local knowledge

for local use. If we are to treat local knowledge as a legitimate form of knowledge we must address issues of soundness and how it can be transformed into public knowledge.

There are five different criteria that are used to ensure a project can consider itself action research. The criteria to employ are: outcome, process, democratic, catalytic, and dialogic (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Outcome cogency is the extent to which action oriented outcomes are created. Greenwood and Levin (1998) call this criterion "workability" and can be linked to Dewey's pragmatism (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Outcome cogency also recognizes that action research is not simply a problem solving exercise but a thought process that leads to more complex questions that lead to new action research projects. Process cogency questions whether the project has sound and appropriate research methodology (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 55). Outcome cogency is dependent on process cogency for this reason. Process cogency also requires multiple perspectives to guard against viewing the data in a one-dimensional way. The third criterion is democratic cogency. Democratic cogency hinges on the results being relevant and viable to the local setting. This also means that the research is done "with" collaboration with a site not "for" a site (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The fourth criterion is catalytic cogency. It is "the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing in order to transform it" (Lather, 1986, p. 272). Catalytic cogency is not limited to the participants/collaborators at the site, but also includes the researcher and the surrounding community.

It is also important to note that since the researcher takes the guise of an invested member of the site and seeks to enact change collaboratively, they are also irrevocably

linked to the catalytic nature of action research. As the site is transformed, so is the researcher. The fifth and final criteria for quality is dialogic cogency. Part of academic research is sharing a monitoring work through peer review. Action researchers must not treat the process as a way to avoid writing for academic journals. It is important to create public knowledge through action research and engage the academic community in discussion (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 57). For action research to gain acceptance "good" action research manuscripts must be shared with other action researchers and the greater academic community.

A portion of dialogic cogency is the creation of public knowledge that moves beyond the context. A way in which I address this issue is through Stake and Trumbull's (1982) naturalistic generalization. Stake and Trumbull (1982) describe naturalistic generalization as a, "vicarious experience to the readers who may then intuitively combine this with their previous experiences" (p. 1). Lincoln and Guba (1985) add, "if you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them with information in the form in which they usually experience them" (p. 120). This vicarious experience largely takes shape as a case study. This particular project uses action research for its collaborative functions and the capability of action research to pursue cooperative improved practice.

It is usually implied that research leads to knowledge that leads to improved practice (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). While this is useful to justify large research grants it is hardly useful for action research and its search for local/tacit knowledge as a legitimate form of knowledge. Stake and Trumbull (1982) that naturalistic

generalizations helps establish research leads to vicarious experiences that leads to improved practice (Stake & Trumbull, 1982). This is not meant to diminish research that produces explicit and formal knowledge. It is meant to give power to knowledge that is tacit, implicit and personalistic (Stake & Trumbull, 1982, p. 2).

A context is a set circumstance that surrounds an event/place. Naturalistic generalizations focus on two different types of contexts for "transferability" of research. There is a transmitting context and a receiving context. The transmitting context cannot know the circumstances surrounding the receiving context. The receiving context can know the circumstances surrounding the transmitting context. That is why is possible for the receiving context to judge if the transmitting context is a useful for their purposes. This creates the ability for action research to create public knowledge for public consumption rather than local knowledge only. There are few people outside of academia that are professionally trained to use traditional research knowledge. Naturalistic generalization is not meant to replace, usurp or wrestle intellectually with traditional research values. It only stands as a way of creating and disseminating research findings to those that need it, practioners.

Site Selection

I chose West Brook for both scholarly and practical motives. West Brook's football program is relatively new and free from the stolid traditions that usually manifest themselves at established Texas high school football teams. Given its recent establishment, the leadership of West Brook's football program has expressed interest in interventions that will potentially improve its functionality. In this respect, West Brook's

football program presents itself as an attractive collaborator for an action research project related to fostering positive coach/player interactions. I also chose the site because the superintendent, the principals, and the head football coach want my expertise in football while in return I gain research collaborators.

The context of the study is a high school football program at West Brook High (pseudonym), located in rural eastern Texas. West Brook Independent School District is a 1A high school with an enrollment of 517 students comprising kindergarten through 12th grade. The football team is composed of 20- 25 male athletes that, due to the size of the school and lack of students, tend to be multi-sport athletes. There is very little sport specialization at West Brook. This reduces the amount of time the coaches have the athletes for a specific sport. West Brook's football was started five years ago, last year being the first year that the seniors had 4 years of experience in a program. Since its inception the team played three years as the junior varsity level and two years at the varsity level while averaging no more than three wins a season. There are three paid football coaches that live in the community and teach at the high school. The athletes are often in classrooms of the coaches. Although there is little sport specialization the coaches are responsible for multiple sport. This means that although they do not have time devoted to the football team year round they do interact with the members of the football team through the duration of the year.

In addition to the constraints of lack of personnel and little sport specialization the team does not have an actual football game field or a full practice field. All games are played as the away team. The practice field is 70 yards by 45 yards. Regulation

football fields are, from the end of the end zone to the other, 120 yards long and 53 ½ yards wide. The east end of the field is a fenced in playground. At a recent school board meeting, I found that there are no immediate plans to build a regulation field or stadium for practice and/or games.

Gaining Entry & Building Trust

April 25th, 2011, [West Brook, 10:00am]

After spending years around other college athletes I forget how large I am. Just walked down to the coach's office and all these kids are staring at me like I'm Frankenstein's monster. Just keep a straight face, no jokes. Talked to dad last night about coaching in West Brook for my dissertation. "Be serious the first day. Don't joke around. If the kids think they are your friend first, you've lost them."

I walk into the coach's office and see Coach Perk. I've met him before but today I was nervous. I desperately need a site. "Jordan, we need an o-line coach," is the first thing out of his mouth while shaking my hand. He added, "…and I forgot how friggin huge you are. Your shoulders barely get through the door." I shrugged and told him I was used to it. That was dumb, I could have made a joke, said something funny, anything. I need this guy to want me here. The head coach has to like me and want me here for my project to work. He's the gatekeeper. I only get in if he lets me in. God I just want to make a Ghost Buster joke about being the key master.

The other coaches walk in. Perk yells across the room, "Hey guys, meet our new o-line coach!" I'm in. I spend the next hour talking about offensive line schemes with the other coaches. They're looking for someone to teach the game and be a good role model.

Anything will be a step up from the last guy, fired for a DUI and running from the cops. Now who else do I have to get to love me?

This excerpt from my personal journal exemplified how Coach Perk was just one of many gatekeepers that I needed to befriend for my project to become a possibility. I began to go out to West Brook daily to coach the athletes in the weight room and work with them on some football skills. The coaches seem to understand what I am trying to do but I need to re-explain things about once a month so I can make sure we are all on the same page. The coaches were not the only people I would have to court. I needed the approval of the superintendent and the high school principal. My biggest supporter at West Brook would be the high school principal, Mr. Cald. He was pursuing his PhD at Texas A&M in educational leadership. He immediately understood what I was trying to create and became an advocate for me and this project.

For this project to work I also needed access to the team and the trust of the coaches. In the 2011 football season I served as a volunteer coach to gain deeper access to the team. I spent my free time at West Brook to cultivate friendships and credibility within the school. It was very important that people know that I am a researcher as well as a coach. Coach Perk gave me access by allowing me to join the staff but it would take the full year of interaction with the coaching staff and team before they felt comfortable around me. For this action research project to be successful I needed consent and complete involvement of the coaching staff. Consent alone would not allow for the creation of an action research endeavor.

Data Generation

I employed three methods to generate data at West Brook: participant observation; interviews; and document review.

To describe West Brook's Football Program, I immersed myself in the context and attempt to capture the players' and coaches' understandings of the concept, the so-called the *emic* perspective. In doing so, I behaved as a active member and participant observer in order to generate that which Geertz (1973) called *thick description*. Thick description encompasses not only the basic sensory information (e.g., sights, smells, sounds), but also complex and nuanced aspects of human behavior that characterize any micro-culture (e.g., humor, gesture, ritual). As such, I was a complete member of the context. This clearly moved me away from the peripheral role that the traditional participant observer inhabits but it allows me to assume a functional role, which is essential in an action research collaboration (Adler & Adler, 1987). Adler & Adler (1987) remind traditional participant observers that active and complete member researchers "relate to member of the setting in a qualitatively different way that researchers in peripheral membership roles" (p. 50). Instead of being an objective observer I interacted with colleagues (with the coaches) and as a coach (with the players). We became "co-participants" in a joint endeavor to solve contextual problems (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 50). As a outcome, complete members come closest to "approximating the emotional stance of the people they study" or in my case, who I collaborated with (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 67)

In order for my collaborators and I to create ownership of the problems, I first address how the social context creates the problems that they face. Participant observation is well suited to the task because it seeks to capture both the depth and the complexity of social contexts and the cultural meanings that defy easy quantification and generalization. To understand West Brook's initial understandings of team dynamics I engaged with the team culture that, in part, creates it. I went to practice, coached in games, shared meals, and was an invested member of the West Brook Football Program. As such, I, the researcher, worked to describe the emic view or the *weltanschauung* (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 67).

To create ethnographic account of West Brook's Football Program, I acted as an assistant coach from August until November 2012. I coached during games and practices, did the team's laundry, and worked out with the athletes in the weight room. As a participant of the team's culture, my observations catalogued much of my experience as well as the team's experiences. I jotted down my daily observations in a journal that was expanded once I get home from practice. Jottings are short key worded sentences that can be expanded into field notes. Field notes, which were created daily, are the expanded jottings that paint a vivid picture of the experience and the observations of the researcher whilst he/she is deeply involved in the context. The field notes serve as the basis of memos that attempt to relate, from the Latin *memora* meaning to relate, to current theory. Memos were constructed on a weekly basis and additionally saught to relate itself to past memos.

While I would have preferred to spend a majority of my day at West Brook High School, practical concerns keep me from doing so. I was there for after-school practices, Friday night pre-game/games, and Saturday morning film breakdown. Additionally, prior to the beginning of the school year, I participated in two-a-day practice, a formative training period in which literally practices two times daily, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. While most ethnographers prefer an extended time of data generation for the sake of exploration and immersion (Wolcott, 1999), I refered to Patton's (2002) take on duration of observation. At a Douglas-Lincoln debate, a heckler in crowd wanted to make a joke and asked Abraham Lincoln how long a man's legs should be. Lincoln, knowing full well that the heckler was making fun of the height difference between himself and Douglas, remarked, "Long enough to reach the ground." Fieldwork should be long enough to answer the research questions and fulfill the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002, p. 275). Although this is a noble goal, I am at the mercy of the football season that lasts from August to November. As such, the fieldwork will be conducted over the course of the season.

In addition to participant observation, I used interviews, both formal and informal, as a means of data generation. Within coaching there is a common practice of conducting introduction interviews and exit interview at the end of the season. Coaches and players understood the framework for the interview process as a normal and useful part of the planning phase of the game (see Appendix A for list of questions). The formal interviews were conducted at the end of the season to gauge how the athletes conceptualize many different aspects of the sport. Informal interviews happened weekly,

if not daily, as there are numerous points during a normal practice during which coaches and players discuss issues related to team play. The formal interviews used a semi-structured interview guide that will seek to create the understanding of how players and coaches define their interactions. Interviewing team members was a tacit portion of the study, although it is not mandatory for the players to participate. It will be a laborious process for the player's consent. The athletes' were not legally able to provide consent for themselves unless they are 18 years of age. I attempted to gain written and verbal consent from the parents and assent from the players that want to participate. As mentioned, players participated in interviews as a function of being members of the team. From a functional standpoint, the only difference between players who participated in the research project and those who do not, is whether they were asked questions about team dynamics and interactions with coaches in the course of their routine coach-player interviews. Only players that provide assent and parental consent were informally interviewed about their views.

Data was also collected by reviewing various documents, such as coaching handouts and popular press selections. Additionally, the coaching staff periodically printed motivational quotes on a variety of issues that pertain to the team and its performance. I examined these documents with the staff and decipher how they create and frame the expectations of the team experience.

The research journal I kept through the season will be representative of my own subjective reactions of the players and the coaches. The research journal differed from other field notes due to the fact that the focus of the research journal is my feelings and

interpretations. This journal owes its existence to the fact that as the researcher, I am the instrument for data collection. As I am a living human being, subject to the array of forces in the world, I can be affected by West Brook. As such, the research journal was useful to monitor the junction of my roles of researcher and a West Brook football coach.

In addition to the researcher's journal I maintained verbal communication with my advisor, a talented qualitative researcher in his own right. Our exchanges served a dual purpose. The communications with my advisor served to monitor my own subjectivity in the research process and it also forced me to interpret how my subjectivity changed the data collection process. As such, these exchanges were usefully incorporated into the researcher's journal in an attempt to fully understand my own subjectivity. After these additions were made to the research's journal I attempted to differentiate between descriptions of the site and my own subjective interpretations of the site. These assumptions were compared to descriptive field notes (interviews, descriptive observations, etc.) for the purpose of data transformation through analytic memos.

Data Transformation

Although the rich descriptions are fascinating, the study does not end there. The research collaborators (the coaching staff and myself) appraised the data to discern patterns and relationships that give meaning to the descriptions.

Ethnographic methods require the analyzing of data in a way that local context and insider meanings. As such, data analysis will be guided by Birks and Mills' (2011)

and Charmaz's (2006) use of grounded theory. Grounded theory is "methods of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). In other words, the findings or the meaning derived from data generation, is "grounded", in the data. I began by taking the transcripts and my field notes/memos from data generation and begin open coding them. We assign *in vivo* codes (Birks & Mills, 2011) that summarize and encapsulate the line or thought. The initial codes generated tentative categories for writing preliminary memos. Preliminary memos were used to make sense and organization to initial codes. From these memos and initial codes I used focused coding in the second round of coding to facilitate the grouping previous concepts and create more salient core categories (Charmaz, 2006). After agreeing on the core categories, I began writing advanced memos to make sense of the new data and to refine the conceptual categories. During this entire process I referred back to the original data to maintain reliability in our further generation of themes that are guided by our core categories. These memos served as the basis for subsequent manuscripts and presentations.

CHAPTER IV

SURVIVING THE GRIDIRON

> Surviving Texas high school football takes many forms for many people. Both coaches and players stake their reputations, their schedules, and their lives on what happens on Friday nights in Texas. For the players, the pressure to perform individually is added to having to represent a student body on a patch of grass surrounded by peers, family, and the surrounding community. The words above the West Brook locker room lintel read, "Hold the Rope." The story behind the quote is: when you are at the end of your rope, don't let go. Tie a knot and hold the rope. "Hold the rope," and various other sayings exist in West Brook's idioculture and are, for the athletes and coaches, defining features of their lives. Coaches use them in order to teach life lessons and players employ them to deal with the stresses that come with being a part of a team. -Researcher Journal 8-27-12.

In the preceding excerpt, I attempted to make sense of the stressful nature of high school football and the ways in which coaches deliberately try to help athletes navigate the many challenges that accompany it. One of the ways coaches attempt to provide support to players is through language. "Hold the rope," is an example of one attempt for coaches to teach players through the language they choose. This journal entry was part of much longer investigation in which I endeavored to understand the manner in which a small high school football program in rural east Texas impacts its young players as they

transition from adolescence to adulthood. Conventional wisdom has always treated sport as a developmental context in which young people, especially young men, are tested by adversity and thereby learn important lessons that facilitate their transition to adulthood. Research in Positive Youth Development (PYD) treats these times as crucial for the facilitation of youth development? Youth sport also gives young people the opportunity to become active participants in their own growth and provides adults serving in a supporting role in that development (Larson, 2006).

The situation at West Brook is rather unconventional when compared to other Texas high school football programs. "Winning is mandatory" is the norm for Texas high school football teams. However, West Brook's situation is different. In the past, West Brook has triumphed in basketball and holds at least 10 state titles. Due to West Brook's past success in basketball the pressure to win is on basketball, not football. The football program is new and not pressured by the community to win at all costs. The football coaching staff is hired with the school board's support of winning not being a key goal at this point in time. In turn, the coaches believe that in order to build a winning program there are a few core tenets that must be at the root of the program such as the need to engage players in more ways than just teaching how to run, hit and tackle. From a research standpoint, it creates a site in which to explore how the West Brook football coaching staff? can engage players in Positive Youth Development through sport.

Youth development researchers agree that there are numerous benefits to be gained from engaging in youth sport, ranging from increased cognitive development and academic performance (Fraser-Thomas, Cote & Deakin, 2005) to enhanced social and

moral development (Lerner, Dowling & Anderson, 2003). Not surprisingly, there are also a variety of physical benefits associated with participation in youth sport (Coakley, 2007; Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). Previous research has also identified a range of beneficial outcomes that are associated with healthy team dynamics, including the quality of team attitudes (Cumming, Smoll, Smith & Grossbard, 2007; Wellington & Faria, 1996), strong coach/player relationships (Gardner, Light Shields, Light Bredemeier, Bostrom, 1996), and successful team performance (Carron, Bray, & Eys, 2002). However, these studies have focused on the outcomes of coaching practices (e.g., win/loss records) and have habitually decontextualized the behavior of players.

Current research supports youth participating in youth sport, but current research trends note how dangerous football can be when compared to other sports. There are approximately 23,000 football-related, nonfatal traumatic brain injuries that result in emergency room visits in the US every year and ninety percent of these injuries occur to youth between 5 and 18 years of age (Johnson, 2012). Similarly, recent postmortem autopsies identify former NFL and university football players' brains as having an overrepresentation of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) (Gilbert & Johnson, 2011), a degenerative brain disease caused by repeated trauma to the head (Omalu, DeKosky, & Hamilton, 2006). The long-term effects of repeated head trauma for youth football players are still unknown, but the evidence seems to be painting football, at any level, as a dangerous and unneeded sport. For football to be salvaged as a viable youth development experience, there is a need to explore its value as a positive context for youth sport, which is possible in this case due to West Brook's unconventional situation.

As such, the present investigation contributes to PYD scholarship by documenting the culture of one high school football program in order to better understand the role that culture plays in the process of youth development. Group culture influences the manner in which a team develops as well as the manner in which it recreates itself to address both external and internal stimuli.

For instance, in his exploration of little league baseball Gary Alan Fine (1979) explored how youth sport teams articulate their collective identity through the use of unique cultural artifacts, rituals, and norms of behavior. Fine's work has led to further explorations of the ways in which small groups create highly localized cultures, which he termed *idiocultures*, relative to the norms and structures of the parent society. Drawing on Fine's scholastic legacy, this study examines the idioculture of a football program in a small high school in east Texas while highlighting the language of the coach-player relationship.

Specifically, this study describes and interprets the unique idioculture of the West Brook High School football program (pseudonym), paying particular attention to the intentionality of the relationships formed between players and coaches. This exploration has been guided by the following questions:

1. What are the customs, rituals, values, language, and material artifacts that compose the idioculture of the West Brook High School Football Program?
2. How is that culture interpreted by its members? In particular, how do players and coaches interpret their relationships with one another relative to the idioculture?

Data Analysis yielded a rich description of how coaches intentionally: (1) facilitate role transitioning for athletes; (2) motivate athletes to succeed outside of athletics through their verbal interactions; and (3) create and perform meaningful coaching idioms that positively shape players' behaviors. Finally, comparing and contrasting West Brook's idioculture to the popular perception of youth sport, I interpret my findings in light of extant youth sport and positive youth development theory.

Review of Relevant Literature

Positive youth development can be described as supportive frameworks and intentional actions carried out by youth and adults to help young people navigate life (Larson, 2006). Though their backgrounds and circumstance can vary dramatically, there is a common, wide-ranging framework of youth development because researchers have identified a general path to adulthood (in addition to general needs e.g. 40 developmental assets) that most children go through (Witt & Caldwell, 2008). (Larson, 2006). As such, youth development researchers owe it to the field and to youth to describe, understand, and glean youth sport practices that contribute to our understanding of the sites and practices that promote PYD.

Youth development happens in many different ways and has many different contexts, including youth sport. For instance, Dworkin, Larson, and Hansen (2003) surveyed 450 high school students about their extracurricular activities. The authors reported significant developmental gains were associated with participation in extracurricular activities, sport being prominent among them. In particular, youth sport was identified as a powerful context for identity formation and emotional maturation.

Among the potential constraints to positive youth sport experiences were poor adult/coach behaviors (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003), one of many problems that threatens the future of American football.

American football grew from rugby. In its infancy, football was played with no helmets and many young men were injured in scrums, a formation where opposing teams interlock heads and push against each other. Walter Camp, known as the father of American football, instituted various changes (11 man teams, snapping the ball instead of using a scrum) that created what resembles modern football (Madden & Gutman, 2006). Football has already faced abolishment when in 1905 Theodore Roosevelt threatened to ban football after 19 fatalities, largely from formations such as the flying wedge. Of course, football was overhauled and made safer for participants. 1905 also saw the creation of what would become the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). It was during this time that football grew into a professional sport as the United States expanded and exerted its influence across the globe. As "Americans as Exceptional" grew, it was more and more reflected within the realm of sport. "Americans as Exceptional" might be understood through an underlying sentiment in American sport that hinted, "moral power was transmuted into physical power" (Mrozek, 1983, p. 169). A victory on the playing field meant that players were not only physically superior but also morally superior. Thus, one was morally motivated and obligated to win. As this sentiment evolved its moral undertones were softened as winning became the goal, in and of itself. The idea lives on today as "winning at all costs."

Past researchers focused on training techniques and nutrition to create better athletes and more wins. Coleman Griffith focused on training new or unskilled coaches in an effort to produce better teams. Sport psychology began moving beyond understanding what made teams successful after Griffith's work and began to investigate the experiences of athletes in a variety of situations and not simply what made teams win (Gould, 1982). Youth sport studies that began to investigate how involvement in sport built the character of young men and women as well as their skill set on the field/court. (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007). As such, there is an increasing amount of research to support the benefits of participation in youth sport programs. Hedstrom and Gould (2004) noted that the increasing amount of research of how youth sport helps facilitate youth development has strengthened the call for studies of the effects of how youth sport leaders, or coaches, help define the experience. The call for such research reinforced Gould's (1982) assertion that more descriptive research of youth sport is necessary to help understand the complex structure that youth sport is situated in order to address practical concerns and stimulate the development of new youth sport theory (p. 213).

Researchers and practitioners have focused their attention on coach-player relationship in youth sport. Recent research has suggested that social interaction lies at the heart of the coaching process (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2004) and that team cohesion relies heavily on these social interactions (Carron, Bray, & Eys, 2002). Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1998) defined cohesion as "the dynamic process that is reflected in the tendency of a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of

its instrumental objectives and/or the satisfaction of member affective needs" (p. 213). Researchers have linked higher rates of team cohesion to team success. While useful for certain purposes, the concept of team cohesion fails to account for the manner in which culture shapes the behavior of players (vis a vis their relationship with coaches) in a sporting context. Devoid of cultural context, descriptions of interaction fail to capture the nuance of experience in small team environment.

Within a situated activity there is a progression of interaction for participants. For youth sport, these interactions are dynamic moments that hold great importance in the minds of the participants. While there is preliminary work to explain and predict behaviors, little has been done to describe and interpret the interactions from the standpoint of high school football players. Gould's (1982) work within sport psychology challenged future research to address the rich experiences of youth sport. As such, a gap remains in the understanding of the social dynamics that create and replicate meanings between coach, player, and the team. There is great need to build a discourse that incorporates themes of team development, coaching paradigms, and relationships. Within this discourse there should be elements that offer scholars a contextual understanding of how the coach, players, and team go about constructing themselves through social interaction. Furthermore, research is needed to understand the manner in which these three entities interpret their experiences and their function as a team.

A longstanding effort to understand how groups operate is exemplified through Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood & Sherif (1961) *The Robber's Cave Experiment.* Sherif et al. sought to understand how the processes of intergroup conflict and cooperation

functioned. The researchers came to the conclusion the presence of a competing group was not adequate to quell intergroup conflict. They surmised that positive group dynamics could only be realized when the group faced a superordinate goal, one that needs cooperative actions to complete (Sherif et al, 1961).

Coaches could potentially spend most of their time addressing goal setting and how to achieve those goals (Adler & Adler, 1987). As groups often need to cooperate with teammates to achieve goals, they must also navigate instances of interactions with authority figures, such as coaches. It is important to remember the atmosphere and relationships created by an authority figure can greatly impact a child (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). The coach is an integral part of the team. Understanding the interaction is necessary but cannot be done without looking at the culture in which an interaction takes place. The coach sets much of the agenda for the program so it stands to reason that understanding the role of coaches in the formation of team culture is critical for the people who work with youth sport.

While a coach can frame the experience in many different ways, s/he still remains a part of the group culture. All members, often through powerful moments that are shared by the group, create the group's culture. Because of this intimacy, small groups create spaces where individuals accommodate themselves to and negotiate with each other and collectively accommodate themselves to larger and more powerful units (Fine, 2012). Shared experiences and meanings create that which Fine (1979) has referred to as an *idioculture*.

An idioculture is composed of the cultural elements that characterize a small group and these shared elements create meaning for further group interactions (Fine, 1979). Fine (1979) specifically defined idioculture as, "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by group members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further action" (p. 733). Culture is defined, created, and transmitted through interaction (Fine, 1979). While the word *culture* tends to gravitate to thoughts of grand scale, idioculture stresses the localized nature of culture (Fine, 1979). As described by Fine (1979), five criteria characterize an idioculture.

The first and most obvious is that the elements of the culture must be known to all of its members. If all members do not know it, it is not an element that characterizes the entire group. Fine (1979) notes "idioculture content is synthesized from remembrances of past experiences" (p. 738). Elements of the idioculture have meaning because of the groups past experience and shared meaning with that element. The way that nicknames are created exemplifies this notion in practice. Nicknames for West Brook were created from past actions of the player's. The second criterion must be usable in the course of the group members interacting with each other. The usability of a cultural element is not a result of absolute criteria, but of the social meanings supplied by the group members (Fine, 1979, p. 739). For example, if a nickname is not usable, or not contributing to the culture, it is not a part of that culture. The third criterion is that the element must be functional in supporting group goals and individual needs. Similar to the theories of other symbolic interactionists, cultural content develops as a response

to shared problems (Becker & Greer, 1960). Fine (1979) explained, "potential cultural elements that are known and usable by members may not be incorporated into an idioculture if it is not recognized as supportive of the needs of the group or its members" (p. 740). At West Brook, there is a rule that on away trips, no McDonald's can be eaten within four hours of the start of a game. This norm resulted from an incident in which a starting player once ate so much that during warm ups he became sick and was unable to play in the first quarter due to stomach cramps. Fine (1979) wrote the fourth criterion is that cultural elements must be appropriate in supporting the status hierarchy of the group. In other words, it must contribute to the perpetuity of the group dynamics and the group itself. For example, even if a well-respected player were tackled so violently that he may be knocked out of the game, his masculinity would not be challenged for fear that it might disrupt the team hierarchy. The fifth and last criterion explains cultural elements must be triggered by events that occur in the course of group interactions. Group interactions "spark" events that produce the specific content of the idioculture (Fine, 1979, p. 742).

Fine's ideas support those of Hollingshead (1939), who stated, "persons in more or less continuous association evolve behavior traits and cultural mechanisms which are unique to the group and differ in some way from those of other groups . . . That is, every continuing social group develops a variant culture and a body of social relations peculiar and common to its members" (p. 816). Fine (1979) also noted despite efforts to understand further usefulness of small group cultures, little attention has addressed the creation and continued usage of cultural items in small groups (p. 734). Just as sporting

teams are composed of individuals, so too societies and cultures are composed of small groups, such as the West Brook High School football program. As such, any exploration of broad topics, such as positive youth development, will stand to benefit from examinations of idiocultures such as the one present at West Brook.

Language is the principal means through which we conduct our social lives (Kramsch, 1998). Kramsch (1998) explained when language is specifically used to communicate it is attached to culture in many ways. When people use words they are assuming that the receiver is in agreement of the words prearranged meaning (Kramsch, 1998, p. 3). In short, Kramsch (1998) maintains that language expresses a cultural reality.

The language a person uses affects the way in which people conceptualize their world (McLaury, 1992). They are so closely linked through a natural extension of logic; language and culture define and reflect each other. Culture norms are products of communities of language users (Kramsch, 1998, p. 6). As previously discussed an idioculture is, "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by group members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further action" (Fine, 1979, p. 733). Linguistic portions of West Brook's idioculture, and the larger football culture, are important if we are to understand how the coaching staff intentionally engages the team for the benefit of all. Coakley (2007) postulates that players are not passive recipients of the world. Vince Lombardi, a revered professional football coach, is often credited with saying, "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing" (Overman, 1999). This simple idiom has worked itself into the fabric of football

and, for the most part, popular sports culture. From this example, it is obvious that language is an important facet amongst sport and more specifically, football.

Football is a game of repeated physical collisions that often requires players be motivated for such aggressive acts (West & Sandelands, 2011). Brunnemer (1980) suggests that motivation is a key factor for success on the playing field. Furthermore, Brunnemer (1980) also states that successful coaches tend to use language to motivate players in order to perform better. Additionally, Turman (2003) discovered that players felt "more connected to teammates and coaches after motivational speeches performed by the coaches" (p. 95). Therefore, a coaches' ability to motivate players through his language is a cornerstone of successful coaching.

Coakley (2007) notes that, "Patterns in sport arise from actions and relationships with others" (2007, p. 47). Patterns and relationship can be largely attributed to the power that language plays within personal exchanges. As previously mentioned, language expresses a cultural reality. Fine (1979) recognized the importance that language (nicknames, idioms) has within an idioculture. He also points out that "without considering meanings, behaviors are meaningless" (Fine, 1979, p. 737). As such, it is the underlying meaning of language use and not language per se that is crucial. At West Brook, certain idioms constituted a large portion of the ethos of the team. For example, the team uses the term "turn the page" to deal with players inability to move beyond thinking about mistakes they have made on the field. This simple phrase holds power for the team because of the team's mutual understanding of what the phrase means. Fine (1979) notes that idioculture content, especially language use, is created from

remembrances of past experiences. Therefore, it stands to reason that shared experience and resultant meanings through language play a crucial role in an idioculture. The language a coach uses to motivate players can shape the players understanding of what is and is not an appropriate action. Arrangements of appropriate actions are both incorporated into and serve to perpetuate the idioculture.

Methodology

My study of West Brook spanned two football seasons. My aim was to describe and analyze the idioculture of West Brook, paying special attention to its intentional language. In order to investigate such phenomena I chose to use ethnographic techniques, through Geertz's (1973) thick description, to better understand the lived experiences and the richness of the West Brook's story.

Located in rural east Texas, West Brook High School (pseudonym) is a small rural high school with an enrollment of 517 students, pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. The West Brook High School Football Program is composed of approximately 25 young men, aged 14 to 18, and three football coaches, all of whom are middle-aged men who also teach various academic subjects. Due to the small size of the school and number of students, all of the football players tend to be multi-sport athletes, meaning they play various other sports during the school year. There is also little sport specialization at West Brook, which reduces the amount of time that coaches have to work with players on a specific sport.

West Brook's Football Program was started in 2009 with 2011 being the first year the seniors had four years of experience in a program. The team has played three

years at the junior varsity level and two years at the varsity level while averaging no more than three wins a season. In addition to a lack of personnel and little sport specialization, the team had neither a football field nor full sized practice field at its disposal. All games were played as the away team, and its practice field was only 70 yards by 45 yards, much smaller that the regulation dimensions of 120 yards by 53 ½ yards wide. A recent school board meeting indicated no immediate plans to build a regulation field or stadium for practice and/or games to address the lack of resources.

West Brook's casual reaction to the lack of support (i.e. playing field, monetary support) reflects the community's stance towards the football program's importance. The following discussion with Coach Eddy on the way to an away game explains how West Brook is in a unique position that has been created from the community's level of interest.

> I don't think we think about the record as much. Since we, as a staff, focus on getting better in small ways. But I think they (the players) look at the way they are playing, there are so many smaller battles, even in one game. I get a great high when they do stuff right and they do too. Since we focus on smaller scale stuff it takes the burn out of a loss. That's a big thing for our team, getting things right, so many little things, not the record. –Coach Eddy

Coach Eddy's believed that many high school football teams treat winning as mandatory. He also felt that West Brook's situation is far different. For years West Brook has triumphed in basketball. A trophy case on campus holds at least 10 state titles.

Football is new and not engrained into the community yet. The football coaching staff was hired to build up a program from scratch with the school board's support of winning not being a primary goal until the program is established. Coach Eddy, a former collegiate athlete, explained the unique situation that West Brook:

> Coach Eddy – I think at other places that are established, there is a focus on winning and it poisons everything else. . . They can't take the moral battle of losing. Because that's sports, you aren't going to win every time. (Researchers Journal 9-29-2012)

The coaches believe that in order to build a winning program there are a few core tenets that must be at the root of the program. One of the basic tenets that the West Brook coaches employ in player development is the need to engage players in more ways than just teaching how to run, hit and tackle. These circumstances differ greatly from conventional football programs that tend to emphasize winning. While the circumstances create a unique site, it is the coaches' approach to the conditions that allows them to take full advantage of the situation.

Head Coach Carter is thirty-three years old, married, and has one child. Before coming to West Brook he was an offensive coordinator at a 4A high school in central Texas. He played at an area high school and won a state championship as a player. He is accustomed to the stress of working for a high school that demands wins from its football program. West Brook found Coach Carter because of Coach Murph, who was hired at West Brook under Coach Carter's predecessor, went to college together. They both interned at a local 5A high school before starting their coaching careers. The first

thing Coach Murph reminded Head Coach Carter of was that West Brook is a small 1A high school and he would have to coach differently here than at his previous school. He would later tell Carter that coaching at West Brook is different for a variety of reasons while adding, “you have to win at basketball but you get a bit of leeway with football.”

Coach Murph is no stranger to traditional programs. To hear him explain it his entire hometown shutdown on Friday nights for football games. Although he believes that winning is important he does not think that a team can achieve without putting the athletes first. This sentiment is shared by all of the coaching staff although Coach Eddy, a former collegiate athlete, has slightly different interpretation. At a Sunday coaches’ lunch meeting Coach Eddy said, “I don't think anyone wants to loose, but there are a lot of people out there that don't know how to loose.” Coach Eddy’s remarks are his personal feelings but due to West Brook’s unique situation his words have been adapted and repurposed for the team.

Mr. Chalmers, West Brook’s superintendent, supports the coaching staff in their beliefs and actions to engage the athletes. He noted that, in his 25 years of experience, coaching staffs whom take athlete first approaches do more good than just wins. Mr. Chalmers believes that an athlete first approach strengthens athletic programs for the long term because it creates a foundation for which further relationships are built. It is Mr. Chalmers’ belief in the validity of the coaches’ approach, aided by the lack of constraints imposed by the community, permits for such methods.

The lack of community constraints and the support of higher administration also position West Brook as a truly unique context in which to understand and develop

positive methods of coach/player interactions. The current study employs ethnographic techniques to better understand the lived experiences of these circumstances. As such, I took on a role as an assistant coach to put myself in close proximity to the team during data generation.

Data Generation

To describe its unique idioculture, I took on the role of an assistant coach in the West Brook High School Football Program from May 2010 until November 2012. In my free time, I would assist with practices, team meals, and performed other necessary tasks such as washing team laundry in the field house. My goal as an assistant coach was to capture the team's emic perspective, or how the players' and coaches' think. In doing so, I behaved as a participant observer in order to generate that which Geertz (1973) called *thick description*. Thick description encompasses not only the basic sensory information (e.g., sights, smells, sounds), but also complex meaning and nuanced aspects of human behavior that make culture possible. Participant observation was well suited to the task because it seeks to capture both the depth and the complexity of social contexts and the cultural meanings that defy easy quantification and generalization. To understand West Brook's initial understandings of team dynamics, I went to practices, coached in games, shared meals, and became an invested member of the West Brook Football Program. By practicing with, working out, eating, and coaching within the team, I sought to capture the West Brook High School Football Program's "*weltanschauung"* or worldview (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 67).

As a participant observer, I generated data related to the team's culture through the creation of field notes. My field notes began as I jotted down my daily observations and reactions to team life. Jottings were short, key-worded sentences that evoked more detailed descriptions of a context when complete field notes were crafted later. Jottings were used as the basis of field notes that documented a vivid description of the interactions and experience of acting as a participant observer.

In addition to generating data via field notes, I also conducted numerous conversations or ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) with study participants. Conversations with fellow coaches and teammates delved deeper into specific issues of culture. They were non-structured and documented after the fact to in order to maintain rapport with the participants. I also kept a personal journal in order to both catalogue my subjective thoughts and feelings about the research process and inquire about my relation to the site and the data.

The research journal differed from other field notes due to the fact that the focus of the research journal was my feelings and interpretations and not merely description. This journal owes its existence to the fact that as the researcher, I was the instrument for data collection. As such, the research journal was useful to monitor the convergence of my roles of researcher and a West Brook football coach.

I maintained verbal communication with my advisor, a qualitative researcher in his own right, in order to have an outsider help me monitor and interpret my subjectivity. Communication with my advisor assisted in understanding how my subjectivity changed the data collection process. As such, exchanges were incorporated into the journal and

aided in differentiating between descriptions of the site and my own subjective interpretations of the site. Assumptions were compared with descriptive field notes (interviews, descriptive observations, etc.) for the purpose of data transformation through analytic memos.

Analysis of Data

Data analysis was guided by Birks and Mills' (2011) and Charmaz's (2006) use of grounded theory. Grounded theory is a "method of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). In other words, the findings or the meaning derived from data generation were grounded in the data.

The analytic process began by a process of open coding field notes and interview transcripts. Open coding is the first step in identifying portions of data that are broadly relevant to the research questions. Each line was scrutinized and assigned an *in vivo* code*,* Latin for "with the living," (Birks & Mills, 2011). An *in vivo* code labels, summarizes, and encapsulates the line or thought in the words of the interviewee to stay as close to the source meaning as possible. Analytic memos were written on a weekly basis and were used to make sense of the initial codes. From the analytic memos and open codes, a further round of focused coding was employed to facilitate the grouping previous concepts into more salient core categories (Charmaz, 2006). From structured codes and patterns, important facets of the West Brook football team were brought to light. Patterns are of importance as they relate the context's idioculture to the guiding research questions.

Trustworthiness

Guba's (1981) model of trustworthiness for qualitative research is four fold: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The first quality, credibility, was ensured by prolonged fieldwork and data collection, keeping a field journal for reflexivity purposes, and periodically discussing findings with members of the team. The second strategy is transferability. Transferability works to make the inquiry more generalizable to other contexts, and one aspect of transferability that I employed, dense description, intersects with Geertz's (1973) thick description. Both ensured that the descriptive portion of data generation provides a vivid portrayal of the context. This ensures that I accurately depicted West Brook's context. The third aspect of trustworthiness I used was dependability. This was satisfied through a range of actions such as: description of research methods; triangulation; and peer examination (someone to question my assumptions). Multiple team members were asked for their thoughts on many of the ideas that emerged during data collection and analysis to satisfy triangulation. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested meeting with an impartial colleague who works with qualitative methods helps the research stay honest. The pair was able to exchange in a dialogue that challenges assumptions and items that might be taken for granted. During data collection weekly meetings with a colleague who works with qualitative data were scheduled in addition to lengthy phone conversations with my advisor. The final aspect in Guba's (1981) model that was employed is that of confirmability. In its simplest sense, could another qualitative researcher take my data and arrive at some or most of the same conclusions that I have. During the weekly

meetings with a colleague transcripts and thoughts were shared. While he and I arrived at many of the same conclusions, I must acknowledge that I was the analytic instrument, it was important to remind myself and the world at large of my influence on the data.

Findings

The current findings represent portions of West Brook's idioculture that are of importance for understanding the relationships between coaches and players. In particular, coaches sought to shape the West Brook idioculture in such a way as to harness the stress of competition in order to facilitate the growth and development of players. Coaches did so by intentionally (1) facilitating a process of role transitioning; (2) using motivational speeches; and (3) by deploying coaching idioms that shape the idioculture's language.

Role Transitioning

Coaches' facilitation of role transitioning featured prominently in the data. For example, at the outset of every practice, a period of time at pre-practice served as a "joking around" period that allows players and coaches to transition from "school self" to "football self." Deliberate actions taken by coaches to engage players take the form of throwing footballs around with the players, decompression of emotions through commiseration, and identifying with peers who live in the same neighborhood. The following discussion with Coach Murph at one of the staff's end of the week coaches' meeting identifies exactly how the coaches frame their own actions to ease role transitioning.

Coach Daniel: Are people excited to still come to practice?

Coach Murphy: They are. Understanding and killing their roles. They haven't tried to do what they can't do.

Coach Daniel: Just their roles?

Coach Murph: As coaches, we try to keep it fun and entertaining. Like when we get out the door we say, "Where are the Bear Creek people, where my Arlen people?" They form their little bonds; even though it's not real serious it puts them at ease that we understand all of them. It's good that we keep it on a fun level, not a pissed off, I'm gonna chew your ass out level.

Coaches did so in a preemptive attempt to create a group driven by superordinate goals which Sheriff et al (1961) suggested were superior to groups achieving efficacy. It was not enough for the coaching staff to rely on players' preconceived notion of what it means to be a team because even though West Brook is a small town, its school boundaries stretch significantly. In particular, several unincorporated towns send their children to West Brook. These pockets of residential areas were not in close proximity. Therefore, players often lived far apart and socialized very little with players not from their smaller community. In order to have the players overcome this, "tribalism" jokes are made to make light of "sticking to your own." Coaches might choose a town and yell, "Where my Tenakis people at? Where my Bear Creek brothers?" Players from that area gather around that coach and whoop and holler. People from other neighborhoods slowly join in for the fellowship. Coaches always make sure to end each mini session with, "but who are we?" and the boys answer, "WEST BROOK." It creates a situation

where the neighborhood alliances are secondary to the loyalty to the team, the superordinate goal created by the staff. In this instance, the coaching staff worked to create solidarity among players that, otherwise, would be incredibly difficult to do given where players live.

West Brook's coaching staff created a space where previous divisions were superseded by overall team affiliation. This allowed players to identify with and bond with teammates rather than create instances of painful infighting. Creating safe spaces for players to grow is not enough to frame the experience as positive. Another tool the coaching staff employs is that of speeches that motivate players to succeed on and off the field.

Motivational Speeches

The after practice/after game speech is a common occurrence in Texas high school football. West Brook proved no different in this regard, and the data offers many instances where these speeches are some of the more remembered portions of the day-to-day life of the team. The speeches serve as a summarization of the day's lessons and observations (and motivationals) from the coaching perspective. The after practice/ game talks hold great significance in the minds of coaches and players because this is one of the only points in which a coach may address the entire team and not just individuals. The talks contain many different content areas such as academics and the importance of being a student-athlete is. These talks also consisted of emotional content unrelated to winning games.

> Maybe like when Coach has us come up to him at the end of practice and I learn more about Coach everyday. Like his little talks, he has a way with words that another coach may not have. He talked, like the first time I ever heard a coach say this, when we were getting stomped by Burrows, he told us he didn't care about winning he wanted us just to get better and to be better men. He wanted us to get better. He was trying to uplift us. Told us that we were his football team and he as gonna love us no matter what. Score didn't matter. - Brock

In the previous excerpt from an interview with Brock, a junior defensive back, he stresses the importance of these talks and the emotions he associates to them. Brock not only talked about the ritual of gathering after practice and games, but also adds certain content from these talks that contribute further meaning in relation to the stress Brock feels to win. The head coach used this time to reach out and address Brock's and many other players' feelings by creating a space where the outcome was not as important as the emotional wellbeing of the players. While most coaches want to account for the emotional wellbeing of their players, it sometimes can become a subordinate goal when juxtaposed with the pressure to win.

> This is my job, this is what I do. My job is to coach football and to coach you. So there is no reason to be pissed off for the next 24 minutes for what that scoreboard says. My job is to coach you to be better football players and better young men. Understand? That's what I want you to do. I want you to play the next half like it might be your last, cause you are.

> Cause people are gonna see this film for the playoffs and they are gonna say dam! Look at West Brook! They gonna remember they they saw you going up and down the field on them. Be a good tackling group, get up on the counter like we teach you. K just finish finish, finish, finish. Cause we are only doing about half of that. Finish plays, finish drives. K. get some water, relax and we are gonna come back out in the second. –Head Coach Carter at halftime during the Burkett game.

Within this excerpt Head Coach Carter attempts to take away focus on the score, 35-0, at halftime by highlighting microlevel skills such as effort and tackling. While many coaches would be extremely agitated because of the score, Coach Carter was agitated that the kids were worried about the score and not focusing on fundamentals, which was a goal of the coaching staff in lieu of more wins.

> Alright, you won the second half, there are still good things that are going on, getting better. Now you got 3 practices let to go get some. This will be for your seniors. And you others guys aren't guaranteed anything either. Lets go take it to Parker Point, good effort, you never died, good effort, you never quit on us. I tell you that this is my job and you responded. -Head Coach Carter after a 42-28 defeat against Burkett.

After a tough loss Head Coach Carter still had words of encouragement for the team. Scenes like this highlight how the emphasis on winning is shifted to team goals of sticking together and individual effort. It was the half time speech that allowed the team to do better in the second half. By focusing on fundamentals and not the overall game,

West Brook was able to score 28 point where as in the first half they were unable to score at all. This fundamentals first attitude was also illustrated during another after-game speech given by Head Coach Carter.

> Hey have class. (the team is yelling and excited about their first district win.)
>
> Have class, hats on. Let's go over here right quick. OK, take a knee and take your hat off. No matter who you play, always, still do what you're supposed to do. There are a lot of things that happened in this game and we look around and think, dang this thing works. And we aint all out of it yet. Burkett, Malo Verde, very beatable. You took it to them last year. Keep you head up and let's watch film tomorrow morning. You know what? We got this big trophy! (the guys scream). So let's get a picture with it. 1,2,3 jays.
>
> -Head Coach Carter

Similarly Coach Kay speaks to the team the after practice on the Monday after the program's first district win.

> We have talked about turning the page when something bad has happened but now that something good has happened, we have to turn the page and focus on what we are doing now. Still gotta go back to work. Too many of you left that page open on Friday night and didn't want to come out here and work. Gotta go home and mentally flip the page and come back tomorrow and work. –Coach Kay.

Even after a win, the emphasis is on effort and team work. By reminding the athletes to "turn the page" Coach K is reminding the team that no matter what, you have go back to work to be successful again. It would be very easy to flaunt the desire to win as the status quo for the team but the staff veers in a direction that is compliant to Head Coach Carter's goal of forgoing wins to teach the game and the possibility to create PYD on and off the field. It is not just the on the field goals that a coach must show focus. One aspect that many coaches must address is grades. If an athlete does not have sufficient grades, they cannot play.

Grades are made a focus by the coach during after activity discussions. The players are student-athletes, not professionals. Focusing on grades serves a dual purpose. First, it keeps players eligible so that the players have back ups. A fuller squad allows West Brook to practice against the whole other side of the ball instead of running plays against a skeleton crew. The other purpose is it serves the goals of the head coach/ athletic director.

> Traeger- uh Head Coach Carter is more chill and Coach Perk was more strict on everything.
>
> Coach JD-Can you give me an example?
>
> Traeger- so say we didn't show up to uh . . . to like practice right on time, we had to run. Head Coach gives us at least 30 seconds. That's one thing.
>
> Coach JD-so the only difference is enforcement of rules?

Traeger- um I mean it's not really the enforcement but the leeway. If like, sometimes we would be talking to teachers after class to figure our grades and Head Coach gives us time to do that.

Traeger, a sophomore lineman, compares this year's head coach and last year's head coach, Coach Perk, in an interview. While both coaches valued grades and wanted their athletes to do well, Head Coach made provisions for team rules to not punish players that were completing academically related things. Coach Carter uses his actions to back up what he espouses in after activity talks. While the dual purpose of keeping players grades up keeps them eligible it also allows Head Coach to introduce these young men to life outside of school and sport.

The Head Coach uses after practice speeches to get his players thinking about the future. He tells the players that it is the diploma that will get him a job and provide for a family. He also iterates that few people get paid to play the game. He refuses to entertain the notion of "The Dirty Trick." The Dirty Trick (May, 2008) is the notion that lying about athlete's collegiate scholarship prospects is appropriate. May (2008) notes that getting athletes into college leaves them in a better position than what they had before. The data show that the coaching staff at West Brook believes that lying, even lies of omission, are unacceptable. The staff prefers to provide information to the players so that they, not the coaches, are making the decision. This path clearly sets the scene for all team members to be forthcoming in their daily relationships within the idioculture.

Head Coach Carter- Man, you know that we won't have any kids that can go play ball (scholarship). Take Dre, if he wasn't in football he'd be a

little thug, doing God know's what. He wants to play ball but he isn't good enough.

JD- Did you tell him that?

Head Coach Carter- Yeah, I am not lying to a kid. But I told him to have a chance you have to stay in the game and stay out of trouble. Don't dangle the dream, but you keep hope alive. Tell them to work and get a good job. Nobody here is gonna play in the league. -Conversation with Head Coach Carter.

The Head Coach believes in being honest with the team but he does not tell them they should not try. Instead, he attempts to tell them about all the ways that they can succeed (diplomas, jobs, etc.). These talks are also seen as a crucial interaction point from the point of view of the players. This might be the only time during the practice a player will interact with the head coach or a coach that isn't his position coach. It offers an opportunity for players and coaches to discuss things that are not football related. Many players recognized the importance of talking to coaches about things other than football as a point of connection. The honesty and candor of the coaches led the players to believe and view the coaches as full people they could relate to and not one-dimensional authority figures (just a football coach).

Makes me feel a lot closer to him as a person. Like I can go to him about anything. Not just football stuff. Like personal stuff. Like I feel I can trust him more, well not trust but be more comfortable talking to him about stuff. More comfortable than Perk. –Harper, a sophomore defensive back.

In the previous quote, Harper, a sophomore defensive back, discusses how his relationship with the Head Coach Carter is shaped by the Head Coaches' approach to talking to athletes and content in those talks. The honesty that Head Coach Carter uses creates a high level of trust. The staff takes the stance that refusing to raise false hopes for athletic scholarships protects the players from future disappointment as well as highlighting the need to succeed outside of the sporting arena. This does not mean that the staff tells players that they cannot make it at the collegiate level. Rather, they simply frame the experience in terms of taking care of grades because even if they get a scholarship they will need to be prepared for life after football. The staff also frames the experience in specific ways to help players navigate the tumultuous nature? of high school football. With the prevailing notions of a "winner's" culture that promotes winning all the time and at all costs, there must be certain measures to help players deal with and overcome not being able to win all the time. One of the measures that the West Brook staff uses is the way they shape the language of the idioculture.

Coaching Idioms Shaping the Idioculture

The language that West Brook uses is an important facet of their idioculture. In this instance, data shows that coaches were intentional with creating idioms that can be tied to a larger lesson. The phrases that exist at West Brook, such as "turn the page," and "getting fired" are used by the coaching staff to frame a portion of the football experience and to teach certain life lessons to the athletes. "Turn the page" is a saying that was developed by the staff in order to take the edge off of poor performance. The coaches understand that this team and its players are quite young. West Brook players

have two to three years of experience with football. Rather than get upset at the players for performance that they are not yet capable of, the coaching staff softens the blow by telling a player to "turn the page." The explanation given to the players is that you cannot possibly do well on the next play if you are only thinking about what you did wrong on the last play.

> Alright, not your best practice. Not a practice that will beat CTC, EYES up. Worry about this team, worry about yourself later. You guys gotta have a little chip on your shoulders. You gotta pay attention. That's going straight from the classroom to out here. You guys making 60's and 70's. Not paying attention out here or in there. You better buck up and start acting a little more mature in class. Cause they'll get you. Teachers will get you; the other team will get you. One of these days you gotta figure out what it is you have to do. I'm going to squeeze, breakdown, make a tackle. I'm going to haul butt and knock the crap outta that linebacker. Turn the page. Can't dwell on the negative. Coach yelled you, well that's sport boys, (one of the boys whispers "life"). Yeh it's like life. You get your first job working at McDonald's and you flip burgers wrong, your manager is gonna yell and get you to do it right. That's fricking life. Turn the page and play football tomorrow. But learn something alright. - Head Coach Carter

The staff uses the phrase "turn the page" whenever the team or the individual is not focusing on the task at hand. When a player has a bad play a coach tells him to turn

the page and forget about it. Don't let one mistake turn into two mistakes. This is especially important for young athletes who will make frequent mistakes. It allows the player to work of self-improvement and focus on task involvement, rather than ego involvement. There is also evidence to suggest that players internalized the saying "turn the page." Damon, a sophomore quarterback, is a talented athlete who is prone to mistakes. He would constantly get upset with his own performance. This caused him to continue to fail to perform at the level he thought he should. He would often throw his helmet to the sideline as he jogged off the field, usually incurring a personal foul. After the coaching staff began using "turn the page" Damon both internalized it and could be calmed by it. While this may not have stopped the initial mistakes (throwing an interception or fumbling) it did put an end to his less than desirable antics after the fact. Sometimes, when Damon could not be reached he would "get fired."

"Getting fired," arose from the phrase "turn the page." When players could not "turn the page" he "gets fired." He is not taken out of the game out of anger from the coach but as a time buffer to let the player emotionally process failure, turn the page, then return to the game. "Getting fired" was not seen as a failure in itself because it happened to everyone. Players treated it as an opportunity to refocus and learn how to turn the page. It also gave an opportunity to coaches to correct what was incorrect on the field and for players to encourage teammates. Players took these phrases and purposed them as ways to support teammates. Over time all players were getting fired less often, but the phrase was heard more often. Soon, it was the players who would be the first to use these phrases and not the coaches. This led to less acrimonious situations between

players and coaches. For players, situation such as those can take its toll on their minds. They had their friends to tell them to turn the page. The coaches still used the phrases but as a reduced rate. When the coaching staff did have to use these phrases they used them as a coaching tool to avoid creating sensitive situations. They still achieved on meeting the players' need to have fun playing while fulfilling the coaches' desire to understand and impact the lives of his players.

Interpretation

PYD can be defined as supportive frameworks and intentional actions to help youth navigate life (Larson, 2006). As such, the direct actions of the coaches of West Brook create: (1) safe places for youth to grow; (2) provision of caring adults; (3) the promotion for an effective education for players (National Research Council, 2010). These three frameworks have been recognized by National Research Council (2010) as three of the five support structures that youth need to make a successful transition into adulthood.

In recognizing positive practices and understanding their importance for participants, researchers and practitioners alike will be better suited to frame competitive sport in a healthier, more positive way. Research on adolescents has already yielded results that support the claim that those formative years strengthen youths' capacity for agency and heighten their ability to navigate life (Keating, 2004; Moshman, 1998). In describing PYD, Larson (2006) called for future research to analyze the ongoing dynamics, or the day-to-day interactions of coach/player relationships. The National Research Council (2010) has created certain support frameworks that facilitate PYD.

The findings of the present study directly implicate ways to build these frameworks by contributing to understanding of how West Brook creates: safe places for youth to grow; providing of caring adults (in the form of the coaching staff); the promotion for an effective education for players. West Brook coaches address these day-to-day relationships and support frameworks through role transitioning, motivational speeches, honesty in coaching communications, and coaching idioms that shape the idioculture's language.

Creating Sites of PYD

Plato (1920) said, "moral values of exercises and sport far outweigh the physical value" (p. 46). Time and time again youth sport researchers have come to the conclusion that there are various benefits to participating in youth sport (Gould, 1982; Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005; Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003; Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). PYD is classified as the facilitation of youth as the active participants of their own growth with adults serving in a support role (Larson, 2006). Additionally, Larson (2006) emphasizes the importance of the spaces that are created for youth to thrive, one of the five supportive frameworks that the National Research Council recognizes as crucial to the implementation of PYD.

The coaching staff at West Brook attempts to support the players. West Brook's coaching staff inhabits support roles in a deliberate way. West Brook's situation is unique when compared to other football teams. Football is not the primary sport in West Brook. A trophy case by the coaches' office holds at least 10 state titles for basketball, yet there are no football trophies. Football is also new and not endeared into the

community. The football coaching staff was hired to build up a program with the school board's stipulation that winning was not a primary goal. This creates a unique space for the coaching staff to focus first on player development. Coach Murph said, "Hey man, if we can get these guys to believe in the us and the system. There is no telling what we could do this season." Coach Murph feels that this would eventually lead to winning. West Brook is not under the same pressure from the school and community to win, this does not mean that winning is not valued at all. However, the manner in which coaches? Engaging players is beneficial for the mental well being of players while simultaneously working towards the coaches' goal to build a conventionally "good" program. This approach to Texas high school football may only be possible when outside stressors, such as winning, are not the driving force. The coaches had the luxury of trying to engage athletes in such an intentional way. Meaningful engagement would likely take a backseat to winning when the win/loss column is the marker for coaches keeping their jobs and teams being successful. West Brook found many different way to be successful through the way that the coaches created positive interactions and spaces through language.

Language as a Tool for PYD

Larson's (2006) commentary of PYD in practice highlights the importance that adults play in the facilitation of PYD. Moreover, Jones et al (2004) suggest that social interaction lies at the heart of the coaching process. For the coaches at West Brook, language is an invaluable tool to fostering positive social interactions with players.

These engagements range from the daily personal interactions to the daily team meeting to (do they keep in touch with players beyond coaching).

Turman (2003) discovered that players felt "more connected to teammates and coaches after motivational speeches performed by the coaches" (p. 95). At West Brook, there was a sustained effort to engage players through motivational speeches. Fine (1979) notes that idioculture is created from remembrances of past experiences. The coaches continued to positively shape the players through after practice speeches while advocating many of the same themes over the course of the season. Fine (1979) explained, "potential cultural elements that are known and usable by members may not be incorporated into an idioculture if it is not recognized as supportive of the needs of the group or its members" (p. 740). Coaches espoused importance of success outside of sports and how to attain it (i.e., through graduation). In turn, this created a space where players believed in the content of the speeches and could then incorporate this information into the idioculture. The implication for youth sport practice is that coaches can instances of addressing the entire team as a chance to shape the team's idioculture.

Motivational speeches given after practice were often experienced as powerful by participants. All players have their attention turned towards one person who is talking. For the team, this is a macro level interaction. There are other ways coaches go about trying to use language to improve players. Through personal interactions, coaches are able to engage in a personalized approach to the player. Smith and Smoll (1990) note that coaches who engage in positive reinforcement strategies are met with enhanced reports of player's emotional well being, a foundation of West Brook's approach. The

motivational speech is where the phrases like “turn the page” and “getting fired” were taught but it is the one on one coach-player interaction where they are performed and therefor where they hold the most power. Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett (1993) note that player interactions, based in positive reinforcement, with coaches also help alleviate performance anxiety, which was also the prime reason West Brook created their own phrases.

Most coaches tend to coach the way that they were coached. This leaves a level of uncertainty in the actions and decisions of coaching staffs. Through proper training and intentional programming (Carron, Bray, & Eys, 2002, p. 19), exemplified by West Brook how they created idioms to facilitate coach/player relationships (Ewing, Gano-Overway, Branta, & Seefeldt, 2002). Failing at anything is a difficult emotion for many people to process. In the past, the players at West Brook took failure, in any form, as a scathing attack on their worth as a person. The coaching staff created idioms such as, “turn the page,” and “getting fired” to deal with the players who were getting so discouraged they did not want to play. The players took these idioms and purposed them as “go to phrases” when they felt they were underperforming. Players would go to players and tell them to “turn the page.” Instances such as these did more for the strengthening of relationships at West Brook than any win would have provided.

Additionally, coaching idioms that shape the idioculture’s language create safe spaces for athletes to fail without long-term repercussions or the further harsh scrutiny that many athletes can face through failure. For PYD, it means providing external emotional support for athletes without ramifications. For West Brook, this support

bolstered positive feelings between coaches and players. In turn, it provided circumstances for athletes to feel more comfortable which led to players following the direction of the coaching staff more willingly. The athletes understood that, through prior support, the coaching staff only wants the best for the athletes.

Furthermore, examining case studies, such as West Brook, provides future coaches with a framework of how to create their football program and care for their players through examination of someone who has already done so (Gould, 1982). If we use PYD as our model of youth development, how do we reconcile certain participants not receiving the full benefits that youth sport has to offer? A movement to educate coaches alone would not suffice in remedying certain underlying problems that exist in Texas high school football. Through a logical extension of PYD, education of stakeholders is also necessary to address how and why coaches are hired. When Larson (2006) explained that adults should serve in support roles he does not specifically outline the proximity of adults to youth and the subsequent level of support they provide. Therefore, it is necessary to educate the public on PYD in youth sport not just the coaches and parents.

There is a common saying in coaching, "you're either fired or you're getting fired." It translates to the nomadic nature of high school coaches and to take the sting out of actually getting fired as a natural part of the process (very much like how West Brook uses the term). They move frequently yet most researchers agree that more positive results occur from long term interactions that are stable (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). There is a lack of congruence of "what is important" among those who occupy the space

surrounding the lives of our youth athletes. If a coach is only evaluated through his/her win/loss record there is little room for intentional programming to care for the players. There is only room for strategies to put more wins in the win column. This does not devalue the sport culture's view of winning but re-evaluates the measurement systems by which we decide who inhabits a large role in the lives of our children. We can agree that examples of coaches that place value on the win above all else are a detestable sight. Coaches screaming profanities at players, physically assaulting players to incite harsher hits are situations no one wants to see happen in youth sport. Yet, they happen. Roberts et al (1992) suggested that coaches that focus on winning create a frame of reference that ties their attitudes to the comparison of their skill to others. Coaches who offer self-referencing models create spaces for players to explore personal growth, regardless of how well the team performs (Roberts, Treasure, & Kavussanu, 1997). Coaches who do so tend support practices that are more in line with PYD (Larson, 2000). The West Brook coaches approach interactions with their players in a honest and candid manner that builds a supportive framework for relationships that central to the promotion of positive youth development (National Research Council, 2010). The honesty that the coaching staff showed in their communications with players exemplifies how other measurements of success can be found. By forcing players and coaches to deal with real world problems (What am I going to get a job doing?) instead of statistical flights of fancy (playing in the NFL) there is more intentional support (a coach helping a player find a job) as compared to the current trend of athletes being valued for their on the field exploits. The coaches do not tell the players that they cannot play professionally. They

make sure that they emphasize the importance of an education so the athletes can have enhanced opportunities for building a diverse set of skills, which the National Research Council (2010) recognizes as a key characteristic of programs that promote PYD.

It is apparent that the coaching staff at West Brook attempts to engage athletes on a level that allows for more positive personal interactions and thus creates spaces for positive youth development (PYD). The staff seems to achieve instances of PYD by easing role tensions (identifying with teammates and not neighborhoods), through the content of their talks (winning is not the most important thing; the importance of an education), the way in which they approach athletes about tough subjects (getting fired and turn the page), and their attempt to relate that the lessons they teach on the field transfer into real life skills (life being tough; working hard for what you want).

Conclusions

The notion that football is a context for positive youth development (PYD) is under threat in contemporary American society. In *Lessons from the Locker Room*, Miracle and Rees (1994) took a critical stance towards football. The authors argue that there are little, if any, benefits to participating in tackle football that cannot be gained in other sports. Critics argue that the physical ramifications may make football unsafe and unsuitable for many youth (Gilbert & Johnson, 2011). Football is addressing these issues with improved techniques and equipment to protect participants. If Miracle and Rees agree that sports have some value then, by extension, football must have something valuable to offer. Miracle and Rees stance towards the current dominant sport structure may not be wrong but they do neglect to recognize the importance that football plays in

American culture. I oppose the notion to reject football because in doing so we neglect opportunities to promote PYD for youth that are already in it. Society has placed value on football through choosing to let their children play it. Certainly we do not abandon the youth that continue to be involved. To better serve those youth we need better frameworks of thinking how we can optimize the football experience. While the long-term argument of football is still contentious (and may prove to be its end), the immediate vision for football offers access to existing institutional structures that can be used for PYD for the youth already involved.

There are approximately 23,000 nonfatal football related brain injuries that result in emergency room visits in the US (Johnson L. M., 2012). The long term effects of repeated head trauma for youth football players are still unknown, but the some groups seem to be painting football, at any level, as a dangerous and unneeded sport. Not surprisingly, these preliminary findings have led to multiple lawsuits at many levels. People are not willing to see their sons be battered when other sports can offer a comparable sporting experience. Footballs days seem to be numbered if it cannot offer more influential "redeeming value."

Football has a strong grip in the American psyche. With its reach and the importance that it holds in our society it has certain potential to create intense sites of PYD (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). Within these positive sites, such as West Brook, coaches create and impart intentional lessons for players to use to understand their involvement in football. While the argument can be made of football's inherent danger, the examples in the current study are indicative of the redeeming value

(supporting player's emotional well being; engaging in PYD) that football, exemplified at West Brook, still possesses. Additional examples, such as West Brook, are needed to exhibit the redeeming values of football in light of the supportive frameworks PYD.

Just in terms of numbers, football has the ability to reach millions of youth each year. Although there are many lawsuits that threaten football's future it does not seem to be exiting the stage immediately. There are still many people that hold football very dear to their heart and cannot be convinced otherwise. As such, rather that working towards football's finale we (researchers, coaches, parents) can work within the existing framework to positively affect the youth that are already there. Until football's experiences a coup de gras there are still youth playing football and there is still development of youth happening.

Examining contexts such as West Brook and identifying key features of their idiocultures will help to identify best practices (as well as non-productive practices) of PYD within football. Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005) call for future research that examines how sport-specific settings can foster PYD most effectively (p. 33). Doing so allows for more recognition of positives processes and outcomes that arise from participation in such contexts.

Therefore, researchers and practitioners should strive to deconstruct the idioculture to produce best practices that work in conjunction with contextual understandings. It is important to understand that when a coaching staff takes the approach of caring for the mental wellbeing of the players with the same seriousness that it takes preparing the team for a game, more positive outcomes and relationships may be

created. It is the intentionality of coaching actions that contribute to PYD that make the difference. A systemic plan that addresses the needs of the players is what helped the West Brook football team create their positive idioculture.

As more researchers inquire about the factors that facilitate PYD in youth sport, a more nuanced approach to youth sport can materialize. The current state of the literature seems to suggest that researchers have a long way to go in order to understand these factors. More importantly, understanding the role coaches play in the day-to-day lives of players? must be understood by policy makers, sport organizations, coaches, principals, parents and especially researchers. We can better understand youth sport as an activity to facilitate PYD when we can internalize how empowered coaches can go about creating positive spaces for athletes to thrive. If we agree that football has value and has the potential to affect millions of youth, we owe it to those youth to see that our claims of moral, physical and positive youth development fulfilled. Furthermore practitioners and researchers alike must be in agreement for specific education programs that present this goal as the model for youth football.

CHAPTER V

NAVIGATING THE GRIDIRON

Navigating the gridiron is a daunting task. American football is one of the larger consumer sports for our nation. The Superbowl, professional football's championship game, boasts millions of viewers each year. America loves a winner, especially on the field. What makes this inquiry's context, a small east Texas high school called West Brook, so unique for research is how the coaching strategies and players navigate the experience in light of the larger football culture that tends to stress winning above all else.

The importance of winning has been called many things: If you aren't cheating, you aren't trying; heart of champion; desire for greatness. I personally dislike the last moniker because it implies that greatness can only be learned or gained through winning. When Americans think about wins and losses people tend to favor thinking about winning. There are so many emotions wrapped up in our desire to succeed at everything we do, even a game. It is these memories and emotions that we drive towards, always demanding more from ourselves and in the case of youth sport, our youth football teams. High School football is a popular sport in Texas. People close down shops, lock their houses and meet at the football stadium to see a win. Due to this underlying expectation, coaches often must pursue coaching behaviors that result in more wins. These behaviors frequently manifest themselves in the way a coach choosing to motivate players.

The spectrum of actions a coach can use ranges from using the proverbial carrot (encouragement and rewards) to the stick (fear and punishment). The range of such attempts are reflected in examples set by former UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden (famous for his caring nature as he mentored young athletes), and the tirades of former Indiana basketball coach, Bobby Knight (infamous for throwing chairs on to the court). While the effects of such high profile coaches are interesting there remains a lack of understanding of how young athletes process and interpret a coach's interactions. The goal of this study is to explore the coaching strategies used by a coaching staff at a small high school football program and the manner in which those strategies were interpreted by its players.

Due to its popularity in American society, high school football presents an important context for examining the effects of coaching strategies on players. The National Federation of State High School Associations (2011) estimated that 7.6 million students participated in high school athletics during the 2010-2011 school years, 1.1 million of those students participating in football programs. Youth athletic programs have generally been linked with various positive outcomes in athlete's everyday lives (Bloom & Smith, 1996; Coakley, 2007; May 2011). Most people who participate in team sports as youth can give an example of a life lesson they gleaned from participation. For example, young athletes learn how to interact with peers and authority figures through the process of playing their sport (Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005; Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003). Youth sports are also a staging ground in which youth learn to behave within institutions and develop an understanding of the use of power vis-à-vis the

coach/player relationship (Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005; Duquin, 1979; Edwards, 1973; Eitzen, 1999). Although the outcomes positive coach-player relationships have been well documented (Eys & Carron, 2001), little attention has been given to the coach-player relationship within the context of overall team culture and from the perspective of the athlete. This gap is deserving of inquiry because players interpret coaches' actions and their relationships with coaches in light of their teams' cultural norms. Given the potentially enduring influence of team participation on the lives of young athletes, it is important to examine how players interpret coach-player relationships, including coaching strategies and tactics affect coaches' ability to mentor athletes.

This manuscript explores the manner in which the team members of the West Brook High School Football Team understand and interpret their relationships with other team members, especially the coach/player relationship. The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the coaching strategies used by the West Brook High School Football coaching staff?
2. How do players interpret and react to such strategies?

In addressing these research questions, I examine relevant scholarship and theory related to the effects of coaching strategies on team dynamics, motivational climate, and mentoring. I proceed with a description of my ethnographic techniques, detailing methods of data collection and analysis. Analysis of the data yielded an important interpretive concept used and created by players to account for coaches' behaviors. The players created and named a dichotomy of New School Coaching (NSC) versus Old

School Coaching (OSC). The data also indicates that the NSC/OSC dichotomy is, as seen by the players, comprised of certain and deliberate actions that are performed by the coach staff. Additionally, the way in which a coach attempts to motivate players in a variety of situations creates a motivational climate that can improve or hurt a coach's ability to mentor athletes.

Review of Relevant Literature

Coaches inhabit a large role in the lives of their players. Coaches spend endless hours coaching, talking, and driving with players to practices and games. The interactions are often orchestrated so that they are meaningful engagements that impart lessons not only about sport, but about life in general. As meaningful engagements can be labeled positive youth development, intentional actions carried out by youth and adults to help youth navigate life, it makes sense to think of coaching as having the ability to greatly influence youth's growth (Larson, 2006). For coaches, these engagements lay at the heart of the coaching process (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2002) and play a role in the positive youth development process.

Matheson, Mathes, and Murray (1997) imply that athletes come and go, continuously changing the contents of the team. This may cause coaches to wonder what makes them successful one year and not the next. While high school coaches cannot directly address the talent level of his/her athletes, the coach can control the specific strategies of their coaching style.

It is generally agreed upon that coaches exert tremendous influence on the team and the individual athlete (Terry, 1984). One of the areas of influence that a coach is

thought to hold is his/her influence on team dynamics. Gardner, Light-Shields, Bredemeier, & Bostrom (1996) used Carron, Bray, &Eys's (2002) investigation of team cohesion to explore the linkages between perceived coaching behaviors and team cohesion. One of the significant findings of the study linked higher reports of perceived team cohesion with a coach's ability to provide social support for the athlete (1996). It is clear that coaches' actions and player's perception of those actions play a large role in the formation of a team's dynamic culture.

Adults and peers play a significant role in the manner in which a team's motivational climate is constructed (Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005). Coaches can also play an important role in the creation of a motivational climate (Smith, 2003). For example, coaches who are seen as providing large amounts of instruction and encouragement while limiting punitive behaviors produce players that are more satisfied with their sport experience as well as themselves (Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005, p. 21). Cumming, Smoll, Smith, and Grossbard's (2007) discussion of the relative contributions of motivational climate suggest that coaching techniques have tangible effects on player development.

Coaches are in an influential position of the formation of motivational climate (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). Smoll, Smith, Barnet and Everett (1993) discovered interesting results from motivational training programs to teach coaches better tactics. Eight baseball coaches went to a preseason workshop to better their instructional skills as well as the level of support they provided their players (Smith et al., 1993). Coaches who had been through the training program were seen as being more supportive and providing quality instruction (1993) This led to players believing the coaches liked them

more and produced increased feelings of encouragement from coach/player interactions (Smoll et al., 1993). Importantly, athletes who reported low self-esteem benefited greatly (in terms of higher self esteem) from coaches who had been through the training program (Smith et al., 1993). The manner in which a coach motivates his/her athletes has repercussions, especially how a coach can further mentor his/her athletes.

At its core, mentoring assures young people that there is someone who cares about them and wants to help (Mentoring: National Mentoring Partnership, 2013). Youth mentoring treats supportive relationships with adults as an important facet for personal, emotional, cognitive, and psychological growth (Ainsworth, 1989; Rhodes, 2002). As such, mentoring can be understood to be a crucial component to positive youth development, the intentional actions carried out by youth and adults to help youth navigate life (Larson, 2006). Supportive adults can lead to positive outcomes among youth they engage (Rhodes, 2002). A mentor's role in positive youth development is vastly different than older models of youth development that treat youth as passive recipients.

As coaches spend long hours with their teams, they often move beyond only trying to improve performances for the sake of performance. They become mentors and/or role models for their players. A mentor is a more experienced individual who, through dialogue, communication and support engages a protégé in teaching them a desired set of skills and or knowledge (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). A role model is much different from a mentor. A role model is "someone who possesses skills or abilities that a person can learn through observation and comparison" (Speizer, 1981, p. 693). When

we look at youth sports as a developmental context it makes sense for coaches to strive to be mentors and not role models. Mentors can come in closer proximity to the state of mind of a youth because they spend many hours working with youth. By definition, mentoring is an active process while being a role model may be more passive.

Rhodes, Liang, and Spencer (2009) describe crucial youth mentoring principles of beneficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, and respect for the rights of youth. Their examples of ethical codes for mentoring come from years of observations of best practice mentoring *in situ*. Beneficence is the first principle recognized as a best practice. It works to ensure that the relationship benefits the protégé or at least does no harm. Youth coaches might address this issue by reflecting on the goals of the athletic program. If a goal of the program is to win, is there an underlying reason that winning is so important to youth that are learning a sport. A better goal might be making sure kids are trying their best. As long a goal is set to an ever moving target (beating the opponent) it creates a situation that can cause extreme frustration for a player. If the goal is a fixed target (self-improvement) it creates more attainable steps to reach the goal. As youth sports is a formative developmental experience for the youth who participate it ought to be treated as an experience in competition with themselves as much as it is with others. Rhode's et al.'s second principle is that of trustworthiness and responsibility. Strom-Gottfried (2008) explains it as "behaving in a trustworthy manner and keeping one's promise or word" (p. 21). In other words, mentors should be able to behave so that youth trust them and be responsible enough to focus the relationship and its benefits on the youth. Apart from purely ethical reasons, youth need to be able to trust many adults

in the journey to adulthood. One adult with poor behaviors can keep a youth from trusting adults in the future.

A third best practice for mentoring youth is that adults should act with integrity. Obligations are to the youth, not to the mentor (Rhodes et al., 2009). The mentoring relationship is meant to benefit the youth. While the youth's behaviors should still take into account the mentor, the overall goal is to assist youth. As such, youth are the focus of the relationship not the relationship's product. Focusing on youth in the mentoring relationship also allows mentors to be better able to respect of the rights of youth, another best practice recognized by Rhodes et al. Positive youth development envisions an active process for the development of youth. By rejecting older notions of youth development as "molding" youth PYD seeks to engage youth as active producers of their own development. The principle means that Rhodes et al. discuss is how adults, especially mentors, create space for youth voice and create opportunities for youth empowerment. If PYD values youth as active producers of their own development it is necessary for adults to understand that youth must be empowered for meaningful growth according to PYD.

Thinking about mentors can bring fond memories of past experiences with personal mentors. Mentors tend to make lasting impressions in the lives of the protégé, good or bad (Speizer, 1981). Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978) remarked, "Mentoring is not a simple, all-or-none matter" (p. 100). The mentoring process is an arduous one. All coaches teach their players, intentionally or not,

something about life beyond the field. The fact that this happens begs a intentionality of behaviors on the part of coaches.

Just as athletes must start with the day-to-day basics, so do coaches. Coaches need to be able to transfer everything that happens during practices and games into positive life lessons (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007). Through the coaching strategy youth athletes not only learn the sport in which they play but they learn how to interact with authority figures/structure. "As such, meeting the needs of each athlete requires a variety of coaching methods and styles in order to create an atmosphere that, not only addresses these needs, but enhances motivation and aids in skill development" (Lockwood & Perlman, 2008, p. 32). Little research has attempted to show specific examples of how youth sport coaching staff acts to benefit the team through intentional action. This study attempts to account a contextual understanding of how the act of coaching is performed and how players react to these performances.

Methodology

Ethnographic methods are useful for inquiry into West Brook's context because it seeks to capture the intricacy of social contexts As such, I served as an assistant coach, which entailed going to practices, games, eating with the team. By engaging with the team culture, I, the ethnographer, attempted to understand West Brook's context. The generation of data was performed through interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

West Brook High School (pseudonym) is a small rural east Texas high school with an enrollment of 517 students, pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. The football

program has 25 young men, aged 14 to 18, with three full-time football coaches and 2 volunteers. The program was started in 2009, the 2011 season being the first year the seniors had four years of experience in a football program. The team has played three years at the junior varsity level and two years at the varsity level while averaging no more than three wins a season. The team has neither a football field nor a regulation sized practice field. The practice field is only 70 yards by 45 yards, much smaller that the regulation dimensions of 120 yards by 53 ½ yards wide. There are no current plans to build a field or stadium for practice and/or games.

The program's lack of support (i.e. having no field, little financial support) reflects the community's stance towards the football program's importance. Coach Eddy discussed the way West Brook is in a unique position that has been created from the community's level of interest.

> I don't think we think about the record as much. Since we, as a staff, focus on getting better in small ways. But I think they (the players) look at the way they are playing, there are so many smaller battles, even in one game. –Coach Eddy

Coach Eddy's believes many high school football teams may revere winning too much and that West Brook's situation is far different. For years West Brook has triumphed in basketball. The football program has not had the success or the time to be fully integrated into the community. The staff was hired to create a program that supports a goal of winning not being the primary goal. Coach Eddy, a former collegiate football player, explained West Brook's situation:

> I think at other places that are established, there is a focus on winning and it poisons everything else. . . They can't take the moral battle of losing. Because that's sports, you aren't going to win every time. Researchers Journal 9-29-2012

In order to build a winning program, in the eyes of the coaches at West Brook, certain goals must shape the beginning of the program. A basic goal the coaches' use is player development beyond physical skill. This may greatly differ from orthodox football programs that stress winning as the preeminent goal. Thus the circumstances at West Brook create a unique context that facilitates coaches' approach that permits them to use the situation to the benefit of the players and the program.

Head Coach Carter served as an offensive coordinator at a successful 4A high school in central Texas. The stress of having to win is not lost on Coach Carter. When Coach Carter was hired Coach Murph also that West Brook very different than his previous school. Coach Murph iterated that, "you have to win at basketball but you get a bit of leeway with football."

Coach Murph believes that winning is important but not the end goal. A team cannot achieve that success without putting the athletes first. A fellow West Brook coach, Coach Eddy, has a unique interpretation to the sentiment. At a Sunday coaches' lunch meeting Coach Eddy said, "I don't think anyone wants to loose, but there are a lot of people out there that don't know how to lose." His feelings are deeply personal but due to the situation the team has adapted and repurposed for their own usage.

The lack of community pressure and the support of the coaching staff allows West Brook to understand and develop positive methods of coach/player interactions in

more meaningful ways. In the service of exploring this unique context, the current study employs ethnographic techniques to look at the lived experiences of West Brook's coaches and players.

As an invested member of West Brook's Football Program, I engaged the context as a volunteer assistant football coach in order to capture the so-called the *emic* perspective of the participants. To build what Geertz (1973) called *thick description* I describe the basic sensory information (e.g., sights, smells, sounds), and the complex and nuanced aspects of human behavior that characterize West Brook's culture (e.g., humor, gesture, ritual). As a complete member of the group I was able assume a functional role (Adler & Adler, 1987) that allowed me to witness more that what would be available to the objective observer in a peripheral role. Adler & Adler (1987) reinforce participant observers as complete member because it allows researchers "relate to member of the setting in a qualitatively different way that researchers in peripheral membership roles" (p. 50). As a result, can come closer to "approximating the emotional stance of the people they study" (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 67).

As a participant of the team's culture, my observations catalogued a portion of my experience with the team. When possible, I jotted my observations in a journal that was expanded once I get home from practice. Jottings are short key worded sentences that can be expanded into field notes. Field notes, which were created daily, are the expanded jottings that describe the experiences I encountered and served as the basis of memos, which served as the basis of the analytic core of future writing (Charmaz, 2006, p. 76)

In addition to participant observation, I used interviews, both formal and informal, as a means of data generation. Within coaching there is a common practice of conducting introduction interviews and exit interviews at the end of the season. Coaches and players understand the framework for the interview process as a normal and useful part of the planning phase of the game (see Appendix A for list of questions). The formal interviews were conducted at the end of the season to gauge how the athletes conceptualize many different aspects of the sport. Informal interviews will happen weekly, if not daily, as there are numerous points during a normal practice during which coaches and players discuss issues related to team play. The formal interviews employed a semi-structured interview guide that sought to create the understanding of how players and coaches define their interactions. Interviewing team members is a tacit portion of the study, although it is not mandatory for the players to participate. It will be a laborious process for the player's consent. The athletes' are not legally able to provide consent for themselves unless they are 18 years of age. I attempted to gain written and verbal consent from the parents and assent from the players that want to participate. As mentioned, players participated in interviews as a function of being members of the team. From a functional standpoint, the only difference between players who participated in the research project and those who do not, is whether they were asked direct questions about interactions with coaches. Only players that provide assent and parental consent will be interviewed, formally and informally, about their views.

Data were also be collected by reviewing various documents, such as coaching handouts and popular press selections. Additionally, the coaching staff periodically

printed motivational quotes on a variety of issues that pertain to the team and its performance. I examined these documents with the staff and decipher how they created and framed the expectations of the team experience.

A researcher's journal also tracked and catalogued my own subjective reactions throughout the research process. The research journal differed from other field notes due to the fact that the focus of the research journal was my feelings and interpretations. As such, the research journal was useful to monitor the convergence of my roles of researcher and a West Brook football coach.

I maintained verbal communication with my advisor in order to have an outsider's view help me monitor and interpret my subjectivity. Communication with my advisor aided my understanding how my subjectivity changed the data collection process. These exchanges were incorporated into the journal and assisted in differentiating between descriptions of the site and my subjective interpretations of the site.

Transformation & Analysis of Data

Data analysis was led by Charmaz's (2006) use of grounded theory that characterize it as a "method of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2). In other words, the findings are derived as closely as possible from the data.

The analytic process began by taking the transcripts of field notes and interviews from the data generation phase. Open coding began as the first step in distinguishing

phenomena within the data. Each line was scrutinized and assigned a code that summarized and encapsulated the line or thought in the words and meanings of the interviewee. These preliminary codes were useful to start generation of categories for writing preliminary memos in light of the research questions.

Additional, more advanced codings served as the basis of memos that serve as preliminary analysis and to extrapolate categories (Charmaz, 2005, pg. 72). The generation of memos were the first steps in making sense the data. Memos were constructed on a regular basis and were a "self conversation" to relate them to preliminary memos (Charmaz, 2005, pg. 72). A further round of focused coding was employed to facilitate the grouping previous concepts raise these focused codes to conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2005, pg. 91). Important facets of coach/player relationships at West Brook brought to light from these structured codes and patterns.

Trustworthiness

Guba's (1981) model of trustworthiness for qualitative research contains four criteria. Those criteria are: credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability. The first quality, credibility, was ensured by two years of fieldwork. This prolonged data collection allowed me to keep a field journal, for reflexivity purposes, that allocated space for discussing findings with myself and with members of the team in the analysis phase. The second criteria is transferability. Transferability works to make the inquiry useful to other contexts. I satisfied transferability through Geertz's (1973) thick description. I attempted to accurately depict West Brook's context through copious amounts of sensory data and later, West Brook's culture. The third aspect of

trustworthiness I employ is dependability. I pursued a range of actions such as description of research methods, triangulation of data (through interview multiple people about the same phenomenon), and peer examination (someone to question my assumptions). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested meeting with a colleague who also works with qualitative methods to help question my own biases. During weekly meetings with a colleague we discussed the trustworthiness of my data generation and analysis. The final aspect in Guba's (1981) model confirmability. In its simplest sense, could another qualitative researcher take my data and arrive at some or most of my conclusions.

Findings

Data revealed many substantive findings that address how certain coaching strategies affect the coach-player relationship. These strategies were described by the players as New School Coaching (NSC) versus Old School Coaching (OSC). Additionally, data were found that establishes certain coaching practices as effective in building and promoting the coach-player relationship while creating a space for PYD. Data supports the NSC/OSC dichotomy as, as seen by the players, certain and deliberate actions that are performed by the coach staff that included the way in which a coach attempts to motivate players in a variety of situations. Additionally, data explains how the NSC/OSC dichotomy affects a coaches' ability to be a mentor.

Coaching Strategy: New School vs. Old School

Effective coaching is a very nuanced act. It requires the coach to be part drill sergeant, part teacher, part mentor, part parent, part righter of wrongs, and fully invested

in the players that they interact with. At West Brook, the coaching staff is unified in the belief that their actions as a coach have short term and long term effects for the team, the individual player and the coach himself. Some of these effects will never be seen by anyone involved with West Brook. Nevertheless, the effects that are seen and are felt by the team paint a vivid picture of the coach/player relationship at West Brook. Through structured interviews, ethnographic interviews and observations of the West Brook football team the core category in coach/player interactions, as characterized by the players, is a coach being labeled a New School Coach (NSC) or an Old School Coach (OSC) (terms were designated by the players). Will, a senior quarterback, described this distinction as manifested in his relationship with Coaches Carter and Perk, West Brooks successive head coaches:

> Coach Perk and me are really close. Its different than how Head Coach Carter is. Perk is very strict. Perk believed in discipline, well so does Carter, but Perk is more forceful with how he did it. Like punishment runnings. He was going to make sure we were going to do what we were supposed to do, Carter does that too but he was just more forceful, he demanded more, that we work harder all the time.
>
> Later on Will defined the coaches as either new school or old school.
>
> "So Perk is the old school and Carter is. . . ?"
>
> Will quickly replies, "Yeh, I would say the new school."

Old school coaches are typified by increased discipline and more force in its implementation. Will has trouble defining all the specific actions that describe an OSC

but he is able to differentiate between coaching strategies in their approach to interacting with players. Traeger, a sophomore offensive lineman, explains this differentiation as such:

> "Head Coach Carter is more like today. Like us like our generation. Like the way he talks to us, he gets on our level. Perk was more, you could tell he was more; he wasn't as well based with our age group. I guess Perk had an old school way of talking. Like, like Head Coach Carter talks more like us. Perk talked more like, I guess, coaches talked to him when he played."

Traeger assumes that Coach Perk coached the way he was coached but he does not make the same assumption for Head Coach Carter. He describes the way Head Coach Carter coaches as, "He is like us," and "He gets us." It is apparent that Head Coach Carter's approach to coaching puts more players at ease with him. In an impromptu interview Greene, a senior, explains how Head Coach Carter's interactions made him feel.

> "So how does Head Coach Carter's style make you feel?"
>
> Greene stares at me for a moment. He leans back in his chair and says, "It makes me feel like I should be out there. Cause he doesn't get in your face, he motivates me to want to want to be out there. He's more understanding. More energetic. He takes time to explain what he wants us to do. Perk would tell you one time and expect it to be perfect. And he did that with everybody."

"What would you label it?"

Greene replies with, "Head Coach Carter is more understanding and Perk is intolerant."

"What about Perk's style makes you say that?"

Greene immediately responds, "Not sure but when he had me in 8th grade, after Coach Tim, like Coach Tim did games and made practice fun. Then I had Perk, it was all business like. Straight drill, drill, drill, and a lot of punishment."

Greene elaborates that Head Coach Carter's actions makes him feel wanted and a valued member of the team, even though he quit football three years previously under Perk. Although He liked both coaches on a personal level, the different actions of the coaches created two very different dynamics. Greene also clarifies that Head Coach Carter understood the players better because he took time to make sure skills were learned as opposed to Perk who, in Greene's eyes, expected immediate results. This lead to Greene classifying the coaches in terms of basic human characteristics of "understanding" for Head Coach Carter and "intolerant" for Coach Perk. Traeger agreed and tried to elaborate exactly how he and his teammates might perceive each coach's actions in the following excerpt from a conversation after practice.

"Is there any other difference between Perk and Head Coach Carter?"

Traeger looks to the field and mutters, "I mean the coaching styles. I feel like we ran more with Perk, like conditioning."

"Is the only difference in their coaching styles the amount of running they do at the end of practice?"

Traeger responds, "Head Coach Carter is more chill and Perk was more strict on everything."

Head Coach Carter is seen, as Traeger calls it, "chill." In light of how Perk is characterized as more strict on everything this can be taken to mean that interactions with Head Coach Carter, a NSC, are less stressful while interactions with Coach Perk, an OSC, can be tense at times.

Players were not the only ones who discussed coaching strategies. In pre/post-practice meetings coaches would often discuss the actions of other coaches in relation to what the believed was the best way to coach. Coach Eddy talked of a coach who had worked at West Brook in the previous year. He said, "Coach Ryan, it was the way he tried to coach, he even said he was from the old school ways. Not bad but for some kids we got, you gotta be a little lenient to get them to stay in the beginning. If they don't trust you, they wont follow you." Coach Eddy's words are reminiscent of many of the West Brook coaches' outlook on coaching. As such, the coaches at West Brook are in agreement that the coaching style they choose can affect players' perceptions, each coaching action does not happen in a vacuum. As Coach Eddy later told me, "I think this stuff trickles down (into everything we do)." It seems coaching styles not only affect player's perceptions but also the emotional temperature of the team. In the eyes of many players at West Brook, NSC creates a more welcoming and safe environment while OSC seemed to a create a hostile motivational climate.

Motivational Climate & Mentoring

In any sporting activity there is a portion of a coach's job to motivate his/her players. Some coaches choose to employ internal motivational techniques, such as building trust and loyalty. Other coaches could favor using external forces like the threat of running, shame, or potential loss of playing time. All approaches effect coach/player relationships in some form. For West Brook, the player's perceptions of coaching strategies that Head Coach Carter, an NSC, laid out for himself and his staff shapes the motivational climate in a positive manner and facilitated positive relationships with players. Conversely, coaches that the player's identified as "Old School" were seen to provide a motivational climate that caused players cut emotional ties with that coach. The resultant relationships from how a coach created the motivational climate greatly impact both the relationship and the coach's ability to mentor players on a meaningful level.

Aaron, a junior utility player, outlines how Head Coach Carter's NSC approach deescalates stressful situations in the following quote.

> "How does it make you feel when Head Coach Carter coaches you?"
>
> Aaron arms go from crossed to loose at his sides while he says, "Makes me want to work harder, no pressure. Makes me want to get better."

Aaron, much like many of his teammates, recognizes Head Coach Carter's attempt motivation through encouragement that allows players to internalize the motivation process. Aaron notes that the way in which Head Coach Carter motivates creates a space where the pressure to perform is not present in any substantive way. The

players want to work hard to get better for the sake of the team, themselves, and coach; not to avoid punishment. This is in stark contrast with the way in which the players perceive Coach Perk's coaching and the subsequent feelings in regards to a coaches attempt to motivate players.

> "Perk is very strict. Perk believed in discipline, well so does Head Coach Carter, but Perk is more forceful with how he did it. Like punishment running. He was going to make sure we were going to do what we were supposed to do, Head Coach Carter does that too (makes the team run) but he (Perk) was just more forceful, he demanded more, that we work harder all the time." –Ratner, a senior defensive lineman.

Ratner illustrates how Perk differed from Head Coach Carter in his direction towards motivation. Coach Perk used the proverbial "stick" and employed it from time to time when he felt players were not working as hard as he thought they should. While every football team has some type of conditioning program in the form of running after practice, there seems to be a large difference in the implementation of the running after practice at West Brook. While Perk often used running as a punishment, Head Coach Carter used it sparingly.

Head Coach Carter, as Ratner explained, has the team run but the way in which he does it is not as forceful (little to no yelling, more positive reinforcement used) as Coach Perk did. The forcefulness that Ratner discusses was the way Perk framed the running as punishment running and not as opportunities to get better, as Head Coach Carter did. Coach Perk used team running as punitive measures when the team was not

performing to his standards. On the other hand, Head Coach Carter used team running carefully and only when he thought it was the best recourse to teach a lesson. One such lesson was instances where players began to bicker with each other for mistakes. Head Coach Carter whistled for everyone to get on the goal line. He whistled for the players to sprint to the 20-yard line and back. Each time he told the team to run he would point out that the same person was last twice. He called everyone to form a group around him. He pulls his cap off his head and says, "That's all done. I'm over it. You're over it. You just have to learn, it's a young team and young season and we just have to learn we are all going to make mistakes. Accept it. Accept your teammate."

Social interactions are the center of coaching (Cushions & Jones, 2006). Within these interactions lies a series of discussions that revolve around a dialogue with players. These dialogues can be used for anything from correction of action to praising of players. Discussions such as these tend to hold the most power, for the players, in periods of high stress. Delroy made the distinction of how old school coaching can be a source of further shame and frustration.

"Any other coach yell?"

Delroy laughs as he says, "Ha! Coach Evans, all the dang time."

Delroy shifts his weight back in his chair. He slowly says, "I was having a good game till he yelled, I shut down and it was over from there."

"So you were having a good game, then he yelled and you played bad?"

Delroy then snorts out, "Yeh did a lot of good then. One bad thing happens and he jumps on me and it turned into everything wrong."

"Did it make you loose respect for Evans?"

"Yeh little, that's just how he's gonna be so I prepare for it." Delroy replies.

"What do you mean?"

Delroy tells me that he just knows he is going to get yelled at and he shuts down.

Delroy, like man other members of the team, explains that yelling is typical from coaches that the players identify as an old school coach. Yelling is seen as a source and as an antecedent of poor relationships between coaches and players. Delroy and his teammates explain that yelling causes a lack of trust and respect between players and coaches. Coaches that do yell are not as respected or trusted as coaches that do not yell. Coaches that yell are eventually dismissed as "yellers" and players expect their actions. Even though players expect to get yelled at, it does not change the negative impacts of getting yelled at, it intensifies them. What was most peculiar was about players' perceptions about how coaches used yelling was how uneven players' description of the coaches was in reference to yelling.

Life is rarely black and white. When questioned about the coaching staff, the players were quick to characterize coaches as New School or Old School, even when the description may not have been accurate to outside observations. Darby, a junior receiver, described Coach Eddy, his position coach, as a "New School" coach. My own observations of Coach Eddy were that he was quick to raise his voice at practice. The difference between Coach Eddy and Coach Perk, characterized as an "Old School"

coach, was the content of their yelling. As previously mentioned, Coach Perk had a penchant for punitive actions. His yelling was no different. Coach Eddy's yelling contained phrases such as, "You're better than that," and "Focus up!" Difference in the content of yelling seemed to have some influence on the way the players perceived coaches. It seems that yelling alone served to a describe coaches and was not a deciding factor of how a coach was labeled. Coach Perk was the one seen as an Old School coach. While both coaches yelled, they created vastly different motivational climates that could impede (in Coach Perk's case) or improve (Coach Eddy's case) relationships with players and their ability to mentor.

Players that expect yelling said that they do not perceive yelling as a momentary outbursts but as an affront to the young men as people. The players want to receive acknowledgement that they are "men" and deserve to be treated as such by the coaches. It seems that Head Coach Carter understands that yelling can be destructive and refuses to use this tactic on any level for any reason. Head Coach Carter does not want to talk "at" the players but "to" them. He has an honor code that he refuses to break. The players believe that this stems from Head Coach Carter's attitude. Delroy tried explaining Head Coach Carter's attitude towards coaching in the following quote.

> "What about Head Coach Carter? How does he coach?"
>
> Delroy responds with, "Man, he's laidback and talks to you like a person. Doesn't make me feel like shit (from getting yelled at). Comes at me like he cares."

Head Coach Carter's way of talking to players addresses two areas that Perk's approach did not cover. The first area that it covers that Head Coach Carter's style validates the players as men and not children. As many high school football players are mid to late teenagers, they are in a transition period that they are no longer children and they seek to understand what they have to do to self validate their own manhood. Treating them as valuable members of the team by talking to them, rather than yelling, allows the player to have similar footing in the structure of the team. Delroy explains that Head Coach Carter is laidback and treats him like a person. As opposed to the second half of the quote where he clarifies that getting yelled at makes him feel poorly. He equates the way a coach approaches him to how the coach feels about him as a person. Clearly, with Head Coach Carter, Delroy feels that he cares for him. Scoot added to Delroy's statements in quick succession as we were all walking into the field house, "Like if you mess up he comes at you after the fact and just talks normal, doesn't yell and embarrass you."

While Delroy associates talking calmly to caring, Scoot expands on Head Coach Carter's approach by examining the timing of these talks. Head Coach Carter takes the tactic of addressing issues after a brief waiting period. This has two effects of the players. First, they believe that by talking to the players later Head Coach Carter diffuses tensions and frustrations of the players. When anybody incorrectly performs a task, there is initial frustration. The second effect is that they feel that by talking and not yelling Head Coach Carter makes it a point to not make an example of these young athletes. As Scoot relays, " . . .doesn't yell and embarrass you."

For the athletes of such a young program, poor performance on the field is extremely frustrating. In the eyes of Scoot and his teammates, getting yelled at exacerbates frustration at their own actions into embarrassment in front of teammates. While some old school coaches may argue that yelling elicits an emotional response, the players at West Brook overwhelmingly feel that it only creates tension and mistrust. In the end the motivational tactics used must keep in line with what reaches the players. For Scoot and his teammates that means taking the time to teach without anger or frustration because it has both short term (performance anxiety) and long term ramifications (destruction of mentoring opportunities).

Interpretation

New School Coaching, as described by the players, attempts to mentor and encourage players. These behaviors are crucial to positive youth development. Therefore, New School Coaching, is integral to understand positive youth development's success in youth sport.

Coaches who were able to create intentional situations that fostered trust in the coach/player relationship were met with larger levels of team cohesion, a crucial measure of healthy team dynamics (Lott & Lott, 1965). Positive youth development is the intentional facilitation of youth's growth with adults serving in a supportive mentoring role (Larson, 2006). Since youth sport can first be characterized as an opportunity for youth development (Larson, 2000) it can be assumed that coaches must address how they motivate players for the benefit of the team and the development of the youth athlete. If left unaddressed, coaching behaviors can be guided by the day to day

emotions of the football season (which is, as characterized by many coaches, an emotional roller coaster). West Brook's situation affords this opportunity to strive for better team dynamics and relationships because winning is not the main goal of the program. The players at West Brook agree that different coaching styles have different results, sometimes counterintuitive to what the coach wants.

Motivational Climate & Mentoring

Matheson, Mathes, and Murray (1997) suggest that the contents of the team are always changing. It is generally agreed upon that coaches exert tremendous influence on these ever changing team as well as the individual athlete (Terry, 1984). Gardner, Light-Shields, Bredemeier, Bostrom (1996) further investigated the linkages between perceived coaching behaviors and team cohesion and linked higher reports of perceived team cohesion with a coach's ability to provide social support for the athlete.

NSC and the way in which it attempts to mentor and nurture relationships with players is more in line with the philosophy of PYD. As such, mentoring is understood to be crucial PYD and NSC integral for PYD in youth sport. Ainsworth (1989) describes mentoring in terms of the supportive relationships with adults as an important facet for youth growth (Rhodes, 2002).

The players at West Brook recognized that certain leadership styles can form a motivational climate that can improve or hurt player relationships and/or performance. Some players gave specific examples such as the way a coach talks to the players "as a man." A prime example of this was gleaned from conversations with players about how former Head Coach Perk would yell. Even though the players knew that Perk cared

about them the yelling did irreparable to the relationship with the players and most times their on the field performance. According to Ainsworth (1989) and Larson (2006) the harm done to the relationship prevents the coach from effectively reaching the player on a meaningful level. While the player may still do what the coach asks the negative emotions that yelling can create impede any deeper relationship. This is not what Perk wanted to happen. While he was aware of his behaviors he was unaware of the player's interpretations and the consequences.

Many of the players offered different defining characteristics of how different coaches behave. By their own classifications, there are two basic coaching styles, New School Coach (NSC) and Old School Coach (OSC). This results in vastly different results in levels of player motivation. Lott and Lott (1965) found that fostering a motivational climate facilitated trust in the coach/player relationship. NSC seems to be more readily available to facilitate such trusting relationship due to the players' perception of specific actions (treating them like people, like they care, not embarrassing players in front of the team).

As Greene explains, Head Coach Carter, a NSC, motivation techniques rely on building trust and trying to get the players to understand that he cares about them as people. This supports Dwokrin et al's (2003) findings that identified youth sport as a potent context for identity formation and emotional maturation. It stands to reason that, in West Brook's case, positive coaching strategies, manifested as New School Coaching, can influence player's identity and emotional maturation, important assets of PYD (Council, 2010). Coaches can exert a tremendous amount influence on the team and the

individual athlete (Terry, 1984). By extension, improved practices to reach players on a significant level could prove to positively influence the group as well as the individual athlete.

At West Brook it seems that OSC is ill suited to positively influence athletes due to rigid guidelines and, what the players perceive as, an uncaring demeanor. Additionally, Duda and Ntoumanis's (2005) work on motivational climate being structured by coaches can be situated towards either towards satisfaction of learning a skill or satisfaction of being just as good or better than competitors with the same effort. New School Coaching, and by extension mentoring principles, devalues valuing the development of ego in favor of athletes attaining subjective success by valuing the individual's emotional needs over the win. In other terms, West Brook coaches that were able to provide a motivational climate that fostered trust in the coach/player relationship, a key element for fully functioning teams (Gardner, Light-Shields, Bredemeier, & Bostrom, 1996). In short, NSC and the mentoring it provides tends to fosters situations and relationships that make PYD possible. This does not mean that NSC causes PYD. It merely creates positive situations where, otherwise, PYD may have been difficult.

Research into the effects of coaching on team dynamics usually result in bland results that say "yelling at kids is bad." While these research findings point to the same general conclusions there must be more to it than just "not yelling." A coach can be just as cruel with words spoken at levels that do not classify it as yelling.

Conclusions

Football is a contested area in American culture. There are those that cling to the history and traditions that football provides. There are others that believe football is nothing more than human cock fighting, injuring the participants and not entirely wholesome for viewers. Yet somewhere in the middle are those that believe that football is both. People such as these recognize the value of striving to be the best you can be (working to win) but they also understand the value that youth can learn from a loss (especially sportsmanship). Regardless of where one falls on the spectrum both agree that the youth that participate in the game are important and should be the focus of the discussion. At its best, football is a useful venue for PYD. Sadly, at its worst, football's violent nature and slow progress to protect its participants may force the public's intervention. Showing how youth football can facilitate PYD may be the best chance for it to avoid such interventions.

Football is a collision sport, not a contact sport. Athletes hurl themselves in harms way to gain glory on the gridiron. It is a sacred past time that has taught millions of young men traditional American values (hard-work, stiff upper-lip, etc.) and potentially harmed our nations youth by its physical nature. Despite mounting threats, football is not going away in the next few years because, for many youth in America, it may be the only "game" in town. However, American culture cherishes football. The infrastructure for youth football reaches millions of youth a year. As it stands, football remains a meaningful context for youth to grow, learn, and flourish within. Yet it is the institution itself that must remain vigilant and grow with the times lest the dangers of

football far outweigh any benefit. When that time comes football will have outlived its usefulness.

I contend that better understanding player's perceptions of coaching strategies are crucial for building the narrative of how the players experience youth sport. Furthermore, it is important for coaches to understand these perceptions so they may craft their actions to be beneficial and not detrimental to the players because youth sport should be a youth development opportunity first and foremost (Larson, Positive Youth Development, Willful Adolescents, and Mentoring, 2006; Rhodes, Liang, & Spencer, 2009). Because youth sport is a youth development opportunity before it is a training ground for future professional athletes we must work towards an understanding of how a coaches actions facilitate or impede further mentorship, a crucial aspect in positive youth development (Council, 2010).

Players and coaches interact with one another on a daily basis. Interactions then that start to frame the youth sport experience in either a positive or negative manner. Since youth sports are a staging ground in which youth learn to navigate various institutions then by extension it is important to further develop the publics understanding of the use of power vis-à-vis the coach/player relationship (Duda & Ntoumanis, 2005; Duquin, 1979; Edwards, 1973; Eitzen, 1999). At West Brook High School, the coaching staff created an atmosphere for coaches to nurture players in lieu of chasing a win. Fortunately, the unique situation of West Brook's created these opportunities in direct opposition of a uniquely American sports culture that values winning, and at all costs.

Without ignoring the role that established sports play in American culture, acknowledgement of the fact that a majority of youth sport experiences take place on the local level and the interactions between players and coaches. I maintain Gould's (1982) assertion that more descriptive research of youth sport contexts, such as West Brook, is necessary to help understand the complex structure that youth sports is situated serves to better address practical concerns and for the development of new theory (p. 213). As such, more scholarly inquiry needs to be dedicated to the study of contexts, such as West Brook, to understand what players want, what they need and the steps that coaches can help players not only survive their time on the gridiron but thrive in it.

A common Texas high school football colloquialism is, "The mental is to the physical as three is to one." For the teams that use this quote it means that training of the mind is much more crucial to success that physical training. The same is true when we look at football from a youth development standpoint. While success may look different (less wins in favor of youth development) for contexts that espouse a youth first outlook it is beneficial for the youth who go through that program. If football is to be saved from the current backlash against it we must look these programs, such as West Brook, and evaluate how they live out such idioms in terms of positive youth development and their mentoring capabilities. In light of such conceptualizations of the connections between youth sport and positive youth development, the main task is the physical as well as the mental well being of the players. Viewing contexts that merge youth sport and positive youth development as the model for their programs will allow scholars to bring forth

more explorations of youth sport in addition to creating more redeeming values that high school football has to offer its participants.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

John Dewey (1929) asked why learning by passive absorption, which is universally condemned, is still so entrenched in practice. Dewey (1910) believed we learn through doing, which is how learning happens in the real world. This manuscript represents efforts to understand how a single team conceptualizes and learns about itself. As learning is done through doing there is little doubt that I learned as much about qualitative methodologies and concerns as I did about youth development. Within this chapter I try to unravel my our thoughts on: my own learning process in this project; subjectivity in youth sport research; how my research might contribute to the body of scholarly knowledge; and how my work could possible affect the way future youth research can be framed.

Connecting Through Sport

Youth sport, as a field of study, is intriguing. Most of us participate in youth sport during our formative years. Whatever amateur status is held there is something about sports that allows us all to connect to each other is some way, shape or form. During my course work I would have many conversations with other PhD students about the nature of youth sports, even if they had never read anything about it. For them, understanding youth sport was as much a part of them as it was for me.

My first goal was to identify and interpret portions of West Brook's idioculture (Fine, 1979). These parts of the idioculture were the intentional actions that the coaching

staff performed daily to help with facilitating role transitioning for athletes; motivating athletes to succeed outside of athletics; and saying meaningful coaching idioms that positively affect players. While these findings from Surviving the Gridiron are bite-sized morsels, the truth of the matter is that they were excruciatingly painful to tease out. This is not due to their inherent difficulty (and I hope it is not due to my lack of experience, but it could be). The story of a single person is a messy, non-compartmentalized version of life. With West Brook it was 30 stories all interconnected with backstories that would leave the writers of General Hospital, a popular soap opera, scratching their heads.

Subjectivity in Youth Sport Research

Typically, youth research has sought to quantify and improve youth programming, supervision and/or some other function in order to "reach" youth. In my personal experience with reading the journals about youth sport there is a lack of understanding of the complex lives that these youth live. Some work feels as though the youth are data and not people in and of themselves. Philosophically, I feel this dehumanizes youth and disempowers the youth we research. While this is certainly not the case across the board, it is a large enough problem that requires more thought, if only to me. As I mentioned before, it was difficult to create these categories. Sometimes it was hard just to get a question in for a more comprehensive contextual understanding. How am I supposed to be devoting my time to looking at the actions of the entire team when sometimes a player would drop a heaping pile of emotional stress into my lap?

Before one practice I had a young man tell me that life was not worth living anymore. It took me off guard. This young man of 17 years looked me in the eyes, without faltering, and said, "I'm just gonna take a bunch of pills tonight." His girlfriend had just broken up with him and he was off of his anti-depressants, a bad combination. After alerting the head coach, we got him in to see the school counselor and he was put on a 24-hour psychological evaluation. It was days like these were my journal would say one phrase, "see next page." I went to West Brook to collect data for my dissertation. Little did I know that taking the role of an assistant coach, I was putting myself in the thick of it. I was a sounding board, mentor, and counselor by my very position. In my first year of data collection, I was woefully unprepared to deal the extreme emotions that sometimes rose up. As far as I could tell, the other coaches suggested that happens to everyone their first year. It was at this point that giving out surveys or attempting to be an objective observer seemed appealing. I would not have had to invest myself so deeply had I gone with other methodologies. Although it was emotionally draining, the deep connection I cultivated with the team allowed for the access to the data that I was granted.

The relationships that I cultivated at West Brook ran deep, at least for me. I feel as though qualitative researchers should "fall in love" with their site twice. The first love is the site you initially meet. My mind raced with blurring fury at the chance for actually "doing research" as opposed to just reading, talking and writing about someone else's. Being around a football team again made me feel nostalgic about my own history with the sport. The smells, the sounds, and even many of the sights were reminiscent of my

memories of playing. At first it was difficult to collect what I felt was "real" data. I could tell emotions and situations were whitewashed. This eventually faded. The real site relief sank in as it finally occurred to me: this is where the real data gets collected. This shift in how others and myself treated my presence led to my "falling in love" with West Brook for the second time, this time for the people they really were.

Contribution to Positive Youth Development

In describing PYD, Larson (2006) called for research to examine the day-to-day lives of youth interactions. Researchers maintain that sport is more than mere physical activity (Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004). It was Plato (1920) who said, "moral values of exercises and sports far outweigh the physical value" (p. 46). As such, this manuscript attempts to capture the day-to-day coach/player interactions as they relate to matters of Positive Youth Development and not physical exertion.

The first article, *Surviving the Gridiron*, addresses how coaches intentionally frame portions of experience for the benefit of the player. One of the findings that hold the most promise for youth sport psychology is how coaches facilitate the process of role transitioning. The coaches actively sought to avoid tribalism through making fun of it. In a mock embrace of celebrating one group over another the players rejected actual notions of tribalism. It seems that this "reverse psychology" performed by the coaches was a success and could be a valid practice when addressing such issues. Hopefully, this will encourage other youth sport researchers to draw attention to how positive youth development can be performed by a coaching staff. Sometimes PYD can be treated as more of a passive act (creation of a safe environment; youth given boundaries; creation

of space for youth voice to grow). While useful it still does not address how coaches might take PYD and perform specific actions that directly influence the development of his/her athletes. This change in how researchers might frame future youth sport research represents the very practical problems that coaches face. Coaches that have little reason or desire to read about theory of youth development. What they do have room for in their busy schedule is specific actions and/or tactics that can directly influence their team.

Undoubtedly, each youth sports team has it own complex problems that require just as complex solutions. Gould's (1982) asserts descriptive research of these complex structures in youth sports serves to better address practical concerns (p. 213). One such practical concern discussed in *Navigating the Gridiron* is the dichotomy between New School Coaching and Old School Coaching. The players at West Brook overwhelmingly desired NSC. The desire stemmed from players perceiving new school coaches as more understanding, caring, and treated them as men. It seems that OSC is ill suited, less so than NSC, to positively influence athletes due to its rigid guidelines and, what the players perceive as, an uncaring demeanor.

Understanding players' interpretations of such nuanced acts could help future coaches understand the way that their actions might be construed. This contribution to coaching education also promotes a reflexive thought process on behalf of the coach. While this might address all issues in coach/player interactions it certainly can help coaches think about their own action in a manner that might prevent future misunderstandings in their actions.

Youth development is a loosely defined as trying to facilitate positive growth for youth as they progress towards adulthood. Much of youth development research tries to pinpoint the benefits of involvement in youth program. Researchers reveal captivating data that suggests that involvement in such activities has positive and long lasting results for the youth that participate. Larson (2000) warns researchers that such research does not allow us to conceptualize how specific experiences contribute to positive youth development in some activities but not in others (p. 176). My work intentionally addresses specific experiences that offer conceptualizations of how we might see PYD is performed as opposed to seeing outcome based results from PYD. For researchers, understand how the process works is just as important as understanding the outcomes.

Implications for Future Research

After examining West Brook as a site for PYD, there is a need to examine other potential sites and how they dealt with issues that were similar to West Brook's. There are two future research questions that directly address two limitations developed through this current study. The first question is, How does a high school varsity female team use language to create and support (if at all) themselves?

The second question is, How are coaching strategies interpreted by player in a football program that is a conventional (more so than West Brook) program? i.e. Are there goals of the coaching staff to engage in PYD? If so, does the expectations to win overshadow such beliefs?

Final Thoughts

I recently went to the spring sports banquet for West Brook. After having had to take care of my other obligations (such as writing, being a husband and a father, and assistantship duties) it was an invigorating to be back with many people I had grown so fond of. I had not seen my offensive linemen in 3 months. They all grew a few inches and put on 15 pounds of muscle. They did not stop on my account' the team continued to grow without me.

Youth development is not a collection of theories to be pulled from the shelf and read when it suits me. Youth development theories are explanations of what is happening in the lives of youth. The team did not stop maturing while I was away. The other coaches did not stop trying to teach the players lessons about the sport they played and about life. Youth development happened if I was there or not. The realness of this thought caused me to do a mental double take. I consider myself a youth development researcher who focused his dissertation on youth sport, yet I had not worked with a youth in conjunction with my coursework, other than my fieldwork. This seemed to be a glaring gap in what it means to work with and research youth. Was this an error of my department or is this one on me? I firmly believe that too often graduate students (myself included) wait to be told how we can use our youth development knowledge in a very pragmatic way. Not often enough do young youth development researchers find their own path, their own way of contributing back to the practice of youth development. I urge others that examine the lives of youth to get out of the classroom and find ways not only to examine those lives but also seek ways to enrich them.

My time at West Brook helped me create a checklist for myself when I work with youth athletes.

I. Understand your role as a coach is the same as any other person who works with youth; you are not there to win the Super Bowl.

II. Teach kids to love the game, not to love winning. Always teach that you care for them regardless of the outcome.

III. Make sure that you know all you need to know about coaching your age group and sport (First Aid, safety/ injury prevention; abilities).

IV. Coaches tend to coach how they were coached. Find a great coach to learn from and start getting mentored (we don't stop growing when we enter adulthood). Never copy another coach, but learn from what they do well.

V. Coaches should reach out to change what it means to be a part of an athletic program. Change comes from the inside out. Be the coach you always wanted.

I have played for and coached with over 40 men in my athletic career. Some were good, some were mediocre, and one is even in the Texas High School Football Coaches Association Hall Of Fame. Each one of them taught me something. At times it was as simple as learning what not to do. At other times it seemed as though a single man, with the right intentions and support, could change the lives of young athletes. I have been praised, cursed at, apologized to, spit at, hugged, ignored and even dismissed. I still remember how those coaches made me feel: the good and the bad. In all cases I was inspired to do better than what was done to me. This manuscript was about understanding my own football life as much as it was to understand West Brook's

football team. Nonetheless, I will continue to work with youth sports because of my belief that when it is done right it can be an experience that continues to provide life lessons long after the final whistle blows.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

How are you doing today? As you may remember, my name is Jordan Daniel and I am a PhD student at Texas A&M University and your coach. We are here today to talk about what your relationships with coaches means to you. I would like to remind you that you may choose to withdraw from the interview at any time. You may choose not to answer a question if it might make you uncomfortable. If you would like to take a break at any time, just let me know. Do you mind if I record our conversation? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questionnaire for Players

1. Can you tell me about how you feel about coach X and how they coach?

2. What do you feel about that style of coaching?

3. A).Does everyone respond to the same style? B). Is there a best way?

4. What is the difference between your teammates and your other friends and how coaches treat both of you?

5. Can a team benefit from a certain way of coaching?

6. Why do certain coaches coach the way they coach?

7. How important is it for a team to respect the coaches?

8. Do you have anything else you want me to know about your relationships with the coaching staff?